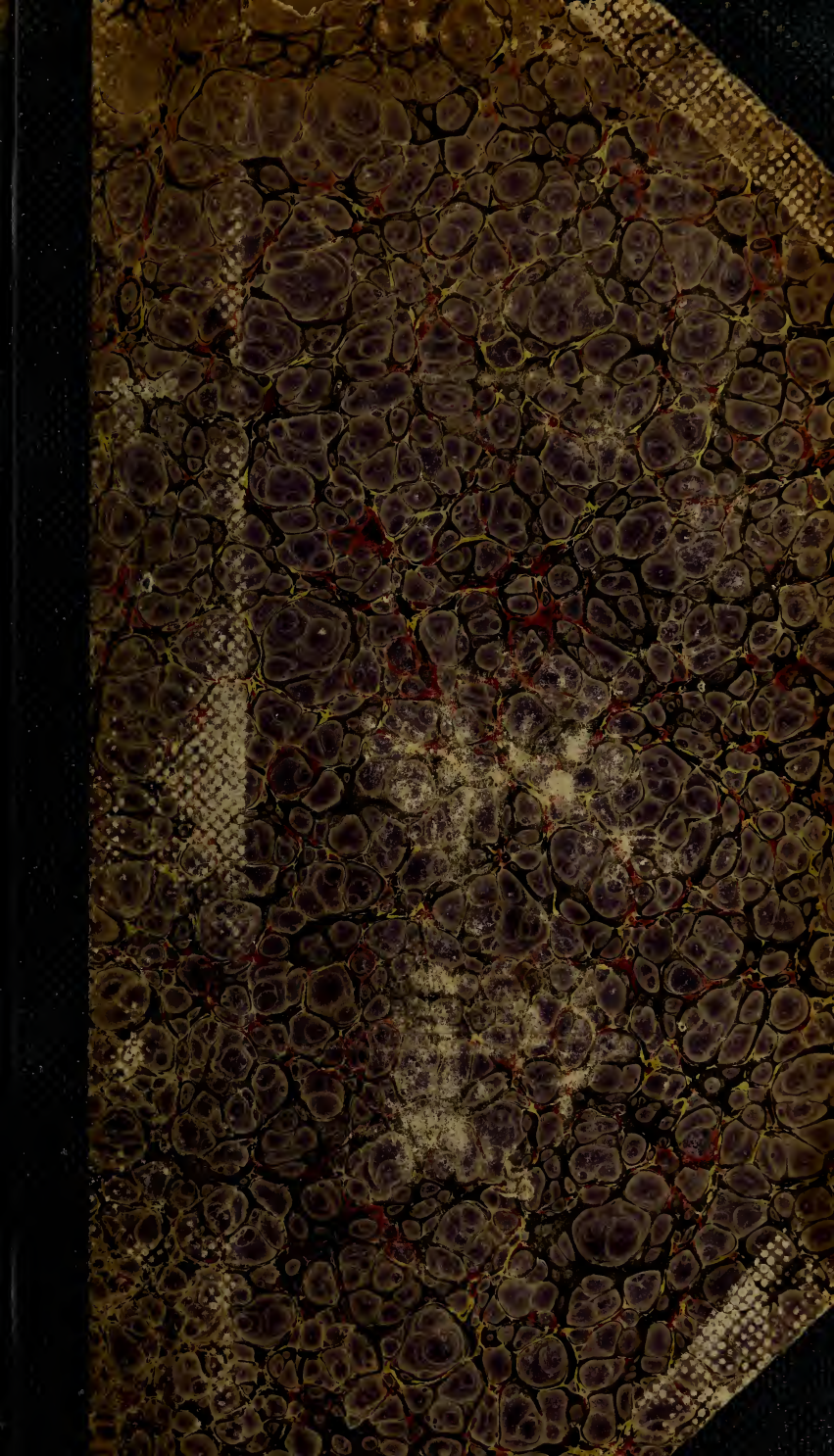




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ALLEE NEEMROO,
THE BUCHTIAREE ADVENTURER.

VOL. III.

ALLEE NEEMROO,

THE BUCHTIAREE ADVENTURER.

A TALE OF LOURISTAN.

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AUTHOR OF

“ THE KUZZILBASH,” “ THE PERSIAN ADVENTURER,” &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ALLEE NEEMROO,

THE BUCHTIAREE ADVENTURER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIES OF ELWUND.

THE mind like the body, when exhausted by painful excitement, is apt to seek for compensation in lengthened draughts of rest; and Hoosseïn, relieved for a time from the fever of anxiety, which had oppressed him for so long, yielded willingly to the influence of a slumber, which lapped both soul and body in a most refreshing repose. Perhaps had he tried, it would have puzzled him to account for that relief from anxiety, which he assuredly was conscious of.

The misfortunes he suffered from were neither lighter nor less real than before, nor were the objects he sought to attain, one atom nearer his grasp; nay, it might be said that his disappointment at Hamadân, had rendered his case more desperate, his prospect of success more distant than ever; yet, however strange, the fact was not the less certain that, distant as

they were, and immured as *he* was in an ancient tomb in the wildest region of Elwund, with stern, unhumanized ascetics for his hosts, he felt his bosom lighter than it had been at any moment since his knowledge of the calamity which had robbed him of every thing that was dearest to him upon earth.

Doubtless, indeed, this happier frame of mind might, in some degree, be ascribed to the confidence he felt in the powerful aid of Allee Neemroo; but more, far more was surely attributable to that delightful buoyancy of youthful spirit, which will not brook to be for ever depressed, but spurning at misfortune and distress, springs upward with a happy elasticity, and throws aside its load; a power, alas, too enviable to be long retained, and too surely lost with the progress and pressure of future years!

To this blessed attribute of the young and vigorous mind, we say, it doubtless was owing that Hoosseïn, when he awoke, which was not till late on the following morning, felt his heart beat high with renovated spirits, and heard a voice within him that seemed to whisper hope. Nor was this welcome feeling diminished, when starting up and casting a glance around, his eyes lighted on the person of his friend Allee, seated quietly smoking at a little distance.

With a cry of gladness he sprung to his feet, and ran to pour out his joy beside him; a

movement which was met by that sedate cordiality, which was the greatest expression of feeling, that worthy personage ever openly indulged in.

"I fear," said he, "you have suffered some inconvenience; but we cannot always choose our agents; we must work with such tools as may be within our reach; and, did you know the extent of your late danger, you would regard security as worth some little privation."

Hoossein poured out a flood of acknowledgments as warm as they were sincere; but Allee stopped him, with an assurance that no such protestations were required.

"I know your heart," he said, "and take your gratitude for granted; but in fact you owe me nothing; what I do for you is done at the voice of a power which I willingly obey. This is what you cannot understand just now, and much besides must for the present remain unexplained. All I desire in return is that you will continue to confide in me, bridle your own impatience, and act by my counsel till you have something better to guide you."

"I will, Allee, I will; by your own life, I will," replied Hoossein, with eagerness. "Oh how I have longed to see you and to hear you! two days have passed since we parted, and one of them sadly enough. But hope has somehow sprung up since then, and I trust you have now come to tell me that I may credit its

whisperings. Have you any news? anything that concerns me? you know what I would say. Speak, in the name of Allah!"

"No doubt I have," replied Allee, "though little I fear to nurse your hopes. The Sheikh-ul-Islam thoroughly roused, not more by your appearance at Hamadân, than your disappearance so immediately after his spies had found you out, is putting all his power and means in motion to discover you; for he is quite aware that the part he has played is no secret, and *you* were among the victims especially doomed, as one who, being most deeply interested in the outrage, would probably become his most active pursuer. This will prove to you how much your safety depends upon concealment; how certainly destruction would follow imprudent exposure."

"It is true, there is no doubt of it, and I will be prudent; by your own head I will. But of others, Allee, of the captives, heard you nothing of them?"

"I have," replied Allee, shaking his head; "but nothing as yet to direct your search. Not one has been brought to Hamadân, not even the Zâbit's grand-daughter; of that rest satisfied, and there is reason to believe that all have crossed the mountains. But as yet my information is imperfect, and you, as no good is to be done, must just be content to remain where you are."

"Allah ! Allah ! this is dreadful ! this uncertainty kills me ! Oh, friend, if you knew what I suffer ! but what help is there ; can I do nothing ?"

"Nothing, but thank Allah for your own safety, and that matters are no worse ! Your mistress is not in the Meerza's hands, and you have said that those of any other man are preferable to his."

"But can we be sure even of that ? How can it be known, that she is not within his harem ?"

"For that you must take my word. *How* it is known, is among the things which you cannot comprehend ; but that I have some power and some faithful agents you must see. The day may come when all shall be made clear, meantime, and for your own sake confide in my circumspection, credit my words, and be patient. And now, what think you of the sanctuary provided for you, is it not a *bust* worthy of notice ?"

"It is, in truth ! a wonderful place, by your head ! but what shall I say ! When the heart is heavy, the eye is dull !"

"True, but let not your heart be heavy, Inshallah ! all will yet be well ; only be patient and trust to me. As for this place, it is wonderful, indeed ; few except such as you see here have ever visited it, and none who have done so, ever forget what here has met their

eyes. Without a guide, you might as well seek on earth for the city of Jinnestân, though being here, there is no cause why you should not know where you are; but should you make known to others what you see or hear, you would be laughed at as a dreamer, or despised as a teller of fables; so for your own sake be discreet.

“ You have, no doubt, heard of the famous ‘Chehel minar,’ or ‘Tucht-e-Jemsheed’ near the city of Sheerauz? That also is a place to be seen and never forgotten, one of the wonders of the world; a work of the times of old, when through the favour of the most high, the Jins and the Deeves became servants to certain of the sons of men. In truth, Jemsheed himself must have had somewhat of the Jin in his nature, for how else could he have conceived and executed such works, the very ruins of which, after the lapse of thousands and thousands of years, surpass the most perfect structures of the most powerful monarchs of these latter times !

“ Well, Jemsheed, who built the city of Istâkher, in which this Chehel Minar was his palace, founded also that of Hamadân, which in his day was embellished by many magnificent buildings, all of which have been destroyed. But great and magnificent as was the palace of Chehel Minar, as it met the eye upon its noble platform, the learned assert

that what appeared above ground, was as nothing in extent to what exists beneath. That halls without number, and suites of vast and noble apartments, stretch underneath that lofty terrace on which the remaining columns yet stand, and penetrate far into the bowels of the mountains behind it. It is said, that were a man to enter the passages which lead to these apartments, carrying with him five hundred mauns of oil, the whole would be consumed before he could traverse one half of them.

“It is written, too, that from thence there were subterraneous communications all the way to Hamadân, and even to his more distant but no less magnificent residence in Seistân; all of which are still in existence, though no one in these times has been able to discover their entrances. Treasures also of incredible amount, and gems of the largest size and rarest water, are said to be stored in these hidden chambers; but all are concealed from the view of man, by the virtue of a talisman, which few have seen, and none can decipher.

“In like manner the great mountain of Elwund is said to be perforated by subterraneous caverns, formed by the Jins, who were subject to *Soleimaun-ibn-Daood*; and in these also lie hidden a portion of the treasures of Jemsheed. Nor are these the only works of the spirits of power who obeyed the son of

Daood. Within this range of mountains, inhabited by the ancient tribes of Iraun, as well as at the Tucht-e-Jemsheed, and various other places, may be found structures like this which now shelter us, hewn from the solid rock, and which are said to be the sepulchres of the monarchs of ancient times. Certain it is that some of the stone receptacles found in them contain the remains of golden ornaments, and gems, and even bones, which probably are the relics of the mighty men whose bodies have been here deposited.

“ But be that as it may, there is much cause to believe, that the huge portals of these structures gave also access to the vaults and subterraneous palaces of Jemsheed; although the entrance to the passages which led to them was so ingeniously concealed as not to be discoverable by those unacquainted with the secret. Mysterious figures, and writings in characters now unknown, are found sculptured on them all; and it is believed by many that some are halls of assembly for Eblis, and the fallen angels, while others are the abode of Jins and Ghóls, who are at enmity with the children of Adam.

“ Among the mysteries in all ages attributed to the mountain of Elwund, is the existence somewhere within its range, of a tomb supposed to contain the relics of certain sons of Soleimaun-ibn-Daood. It is said to

be guarded by spirits, bound to this duty by a talisman, sealed with the seal of that wise and powerful monarch. But although all, who are acquainted with the mountain, are agreed in the fact, that such a tomb does exist, no one has ever been able to confirm the assertion by the evidence of his senses.

“ Yet the place has long been known ; perhaps from the remotest times, though occasionally lost sight of and again discovered. The last occasion, on which we are aware of its being made known to men, was a memorable one. It was when the armies of the fierce Hoolakoo overran this country, and sought to exterminate the followers of the well known Hussun Sebah ;* a few of that persecuted sect, escaping from the country of their prince, took refuge in the mountains of Gerroos and Elwund.

“ Among these was an aged man, whose austere abstinence and unwearied perseverance in prayer and abstract contemplation, had gained him the reputation of a prophet among his tribe, and who had accompanied the rest, rather in accordance with their prayers, than to escape a destruction which had no terrors for him. Worn out with toil this holy man had thrown his attenuated limbs upon a grassy bank by the side of a little rill, from which he had

* The founder of that sect known by the name of the Assassins ; the Sheikh-ul-jibel, or Old Man of the Mountain.

just quenched his thirst, and had given way to sleep, when a dream or vision came upon his soul, and he saw before him a stern looking personage, whom he recognised as the founder of his sect, and who, addressing him in solemn tones, said,

“ ‘ Zealous and faithful disciple, rise and follow me.’

“ The saint obeyed, and after proceeding for a while, was led by his revered guide to a certain spot, where striking with his foot upon a rock, it opened, displaying a passage which led onwards. Into this the mysterious visitant solemnly beckoned him to enter, and the vision departed.

“ Rousing himself from sleep, the holy man looked around him, and saw, to his amazement, that the whole aspect of the place had changed. He rose, and recognising some of the features which had marked the landscape of his dream, proceeded onwards till he found the very spot where the figure had vanished, and soon, guided no doubt by the same supernatural agency, discovered the access which admitted him to the very spot where you now are. Since then the secret has been regularly transmitted downwards by a succession of ascetics, dervishes, or calunders, such as you have now seen here; and it still continues, as it has always been, a refuge and a sanctuary; an abode of tranquillity and peace; a sure and

undisturbed retreat for holy meditation, and devout prayer.

“ This is unquestionably the place, by tradition regarded as the Ghabr-i-beni-Suleiman, and supposed to exist in this mountain; but whether it be in reality the sepulchre of any of that monarch’s family, or a mausoleum of the house of Jemsheed, those only will be enabled to tell who shall decipher that mysterious writing. Of its extent, however, you might easily satisfy yourself, were it not for the danger of being lost in the innumerable windings of caverns that stretch into the mountain, an accident that has happened to more than one of the brethren who have tried the enterprise.”

“ A wonderful tale, indeed !” said Hoossein, when his friend had left off speaking, feeling interested in spite of himself, and beguiled for awhile of his anxiety, “ and have none of these wonderful treasures you spoke of been ever discovered ?”

“ No ; no record or tradition exists of any such discovery. But there is a talisman not far from hence, which is said to cover or to guard vast wealth.”

“ Indeed ! and is this talisman visible to mortal eyes ?”

“ Perfectly visible ; it consists of two tablets cut in the solid rock, in character resembling those you see here, doubtless belonging to the same times, and connected with the

rest of these great and ancient works. Whether there be magic or witchcraft in the business or not, Allah alone can say ! but this I can declare, that whatever Jins or Demons may have dwelt here in times of old, for many ages past it has given shelter to some of the worthies of the descendants of Adam. Here the pious and the enlightened pursue their holy studies, men, whose progress in divine knowledge has well rewarded the wasting of their earthly frames. This floor has been the resting place of many a gifted dervish. These walls have witnessed some of the most remarkable austerities and severest discipline ever endured by adept panting for absorption in the divine essence !

“ You gaze at me, and wonder, no doubt, that he, whom you have known but as Allee Neemroo, the horse-dealer, should be found the companion of dervishes and fakeers ; this also is of the things which cannot now be explained, and which demand your patience. In the meantime I must again leave you ; nay, be satisfied, it must be so ; for your own service it must. Here you must remain, but not immured within this darksome vault ; you can breathe the fresh air beyond the portal in the chasm by which you reached it ; but seek not to move beyond it ; the attempt would be vain, and might prove dangerous ; so avoid it as you would forward the object of your wishes.”

It were useless to describe the condition of

Hoossein's mind after the departure of his friend. With Allee departed also all the buoyancy of spirits, and the fresh ardor of hope in which, in the morning, he had exulted; so true is it that the human mind, unsustained by some powerful and enduring staff of confidence, is the sport of every passing incident that seems to affect the immediate object of its desire, as the clear lake reflects every gleam of sunshine and passing cloud that changes the face of the sky above it. And Hoossein, though he did confide in his friend, was far too sensitive to resist the disheartening influence of a separation from him, to whom he looked for comfort and support.

In vain did he attempt to bridle his uneasiness, to control the anxious inquietude, that again devoured him. He sought the open air and met no opposition; though in passing through the entrance chamber, he perceived there, fixed as before, in the self-same attitude, with marble features half up-turned, and half glazed eye, motionless in its rigid lids, the ghastly figure which had startled him at first, the aspirant for that final reward of Sooffeeism—entire absorption in the divinity.

The smiling face of heaven, small as was the portion that could be discerned from the depth of the chasm, together with the free and bracing air, revived his spirits and somewhat calmed his mind. He tried to reason himself into tranquillity; but his judgment refused to

receive the arguments with which he sought to allay his apprehension. He could not but feel, that while he was thus in point of fact a prisoner, all that was dearest to him in life might be exposed to the most frightful doom.

From such reflections no comfort was to be gathered ; so after having brooded over them, till his mind became fevered with excitement, he sought relief in examining the scene, into which he had been so strangely thrown.

It was impressive enough to arrest the most indifferent. It has been mentioned, that the chasm was walled with solid rock, and Hoossein saw that in most places it beetled inwards, as if threatening the little hollow at its feet, so that the opening above was even smaller than the space below. Nor had these threats been altogether empty, for that little space was incumbered by the fragments, which time had rent from the impending cliffs.

The chasm in length scarcely extended two hundred paces, and the rocks reared themselves so high, and so nearly closed themselves above it, that one might have imagined, that an active goat could bound across the gap, the lips of which were rough with thorny shrubs. But the bones of many animals, which in straggling among the rocks had fallen into the yawning abyss, gave evidence that no such feat could be attempted, even by them, with impunity.

Looking from one end, the eye gazing up-

wards could detect a craggy snow-streaked peak, soaring high into the clouds ; and judging from the scenery he had passed through, on the morning of his arrival at the place, Hoossein became convinced, that persons ignorant of its existence might easily pass it by as only a dangerous rift in the rocky crest of the mountain, caused by the winter torrents, which might find through it a passage to the hidden reservoirs in its bowels.

Hoossein, more than once, traversed from end to end the area of this secluded glen, examining every turn and angle of the rock, with curious eye ; but to discover the place by which he had entered defied his penetration. The rill, indeed, which oozed from numerous little springs, on either side, made its way among fragments heaped on one another, at its lower extremity, until lost to sight ; but no hollow appeared, by which even a fox could have escaped.

Wondering, and at fault, he returned to the point, where in its secluded angle rose the dark grey portal of impenetrable rock, tinted by a few lichens, the growth of ages, which lent a warm tinge to the cold stone ; and again his eye rested on the symbolic figures and mysterious inscriptions, indelibly impressed on their respective tablets ; and he gazed and mused, until strange fancies mounted to his brain, and the tales he had heard of magic and necro-

mancy, and of these spirits which the adepts in these dark sciences had rendered subject to their will, recurred to his memory, and he could not help thinking, that in spite of what his friend, Allee Neemroo, had asserted, the very cavern where he now stood was a spot in every way well calculated for such pursuits, and that the wild grotesque enthusiasts, who made it their retreat, might well be regarded as seekers after such forbidden power.

Nor could he refrain from starting, as his eye fell on one of those very mystics, on whom his thoughts had just been fixed, issuing from the dark aperture; and the question, whether he himself might not now be a victim of some bewildering spell, thrilled through his brain with startling suddenness. Perplexed in mind, and sick at heart, he once more entered the portal, and sought a temporary relief from the misery of his own thoughts, in the homely conversation of his foster-brother and comrade.

The day at length wore on, as days, however dull and anxious, will do. Sleep, the friend of the wretched, beguiled much of the ensuing night; but the dawn brought no relief. "Joy came" not "in the morning," and the restless inquietude of the long, long succeeding day, was such, that Hoossein thought the worst of certainty could have no greater torture in store.

He woke from a troubled slumber, with the instinctive consciousness of some one near, and looking upwards, was greeted by the face of Allee Neemroo, who was bending over his couch. Uncertain, whether he was not still under the influence of sleep, he gazed around with a vague stare. The light, that streamed through the rocky walls, informed him, that morning had already broken upon the world, and Hoosseïn rousing himself, gave full scope to his delight at again seeing his friend.

"You have news for me, Allee," said he, looking earnestly at the horse-dealer. "I see it in your expression. Good or bad, in the name of Allah, tell it to me!"

"I have news, Hoosseïn, and whether for good or for ill, you shall hear all. I told you before, and I now confirm it, that the Zâbit's grand-child is not in the Sheikh-ul-Islam's harem, nor in Hamadân. He has been out-witted at his own game, by a clumsy robber; a fellow who beyond the taking his plunder, and making the best of it, has scarcely tact to grope his own way in the dark. By the bargain between them, Roostum Beg was to have for his share of the prey all the property, or captives, he could secure in Ameenabâd, save and except the Hadjee's grandchild, and yourself, Aga Hoosseïn; for both of whose persons, the Sheikh-ul-Islam appears to have

conceived a strong attachment. These two accordingly, he stipulated, should be delivered up to him ; and in return, so highly did he value the prize, he promised to protect him against the anger of Caussim Khan, of Gilpaigaun, who, it was presumed, might take offence at this invasion of his dependants ; and he further, it appears, provoked the man's cupidity, by the proffer of a considerable sum in gold.

“But this, it appears, was not the first of his dealings of the sort between the worthy priest and the Buchtiaree robber ; so that the latter knew his man, and having, on the other hand, as he conceived, the means of pacifying Caussim Khan, while on the other, he placed no great reliance on the Sheikh-ul-Islam's promises, conveyed to him as they were only by a sugar-tongued messenger, he determined, while executing the priest's behests, to retain in his hands the means of securing the fulfilment of the other's engagement, and, perhaps, of making him pay down handsomely for old scores.

“Thus, when the old man's grand-child was seized by the Meerza's Gholaums, who bore her off at once, they were met, as they rode incumbered by booty, on their way down the glen, by Roostum Beg with a strong party, who soon relieved them of their burthen, and sent them to their master, with a message, that the girl was merely retained as a pledge for the per-

formance of his promises both past and current, and that whether she were ransomed or not, he little cared, as she would fetch, at least, as high a price from the Turkish Pashah at Baghdad.

“You may imagine the rage of Sheikh-ul-Islam on receiving this message. It was beyond all control ; and he would have made an example of the baffled Gholaums, had not a conduct so insane been checked by the representations of one of his ministers, Aga Jeewah, who had escaped, with difficulty, the fate of his companions, from your hands, Hoossein, at the village. *He* saw the danger his master was running into, and had the address to check his extravagance by stimulating him to seek revenge upon Roostum Beg himself.

“This double-dyed ruffian, for such, in truth, he is, had, it appears, divided the spoil, captives and all, among his followers, retaining to himself, the choicest of every thing ; and there is no doubt that many of them, if not all, have been sent to Kermanshah, in hopes of being sold to the Turks ; but whether the Hadjee’s grand-child be among the number so sent, has not been discovered by my emissaries. Such, my friend, is the amount of my tidings ; whether you hold it to contain a greater share of good or of evil, it is truth, and may be depended on.”

“Good, good by your soul, Allee ; I owe you the *Mujdeh !*” said Hoossein, eagerly ; “to hear that that miscreant priest has been baffled

is life to me. I could hug the brute of a robber for having thwarted his villanous designs. Oh heaven ! it never could be Allah's will that so bright and innocent a lamb as my Ausieh should fall into that wolf's jaws ; that her fair head should be defiled with the dust of such misery ! What must now be done is clear ; to Kermanshah I must go without delay. Ausieh may be there already. Oh misery ! may she not already have been sold ; sold like a common slave to some villanous Osmanlee ! But God forbid ! God forbid ! Let me not fancy it ; I should go mad ! At all events I may hear of her. I may find some of our unfortunate Ryots, and contrive means for restoring them to their families ; yes, by your own soul, Allee, I must go at once to Kermanshah !”

“Softly youth, softly,” replied Allee calmly ; “let us reflect. Your wish is to do good not evil ; to provide for the security of your friends, not to ruin them. Rashness may do the last, but will never effect the first. Listen, and try to be prudent ; without prudence and self-possession you will ruin yourself and fail of aiding those you so greatly desire to relieve.

“The captives of Ameenabâd must be accompanied by some, at least, of their captors, agents for the rest to dispose of the general booty. Were you to be discovered by these, at Kermanshah, and how great the chance of your being so ! what, think you, would be the

value of your life ? You a victim on whose head a price has been set by the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân ! And, then, think you not that this disappointed priest will have his own spies and emissaries swarming there, and on all the border, knowing, as he must do, that thither will the captives be brought, and with them the fair cause of all this mischief ? Would these long fail of recognising Hoossein of Ameenabâd ? How then should he escape destruction ? Now where would be the profit of such a result ? It would promote the designs of the wicked, and leave the innocent without a protector, at his mercy. It is a consummation, therefore, to be avoided."

"Allah ! Allah ! There is truth and reason in what you say. I feel it all, by your soul I do. But what then is to be done ? If I go not thither, who is there to help these wretched people ? I cannot leave them to be sold like beasts without an effort to assist them. I cannot abandon *her*, Allee."

"But the question here is not so much, who is there to aid them if you should hang back ; as *could* you aid them effectually by such dangerous self-exposure at present ; and whether by holding back for a time you may not afterwards interfere with far more effect than you could just now, even were you to escape the risks you must run in doing so?"

"Allah alone can tell, Allee ; for, truth to say,

I am bewildered, perplexed, half mad ; I acknowledge the justice of all you state, but to wait in this uncertainty, with the fear that all may be lost by delay, tortured with anxiety and fear, by your own soul, it is worse than death. This suspense is torture. Two days and nights like the last would kill me ; not the joys of paradise would bribe me to endure them. To think she may be actually in Kermanshah ; nay, purchased and carried off to a Turkish harem ! By the head of my father, I could not bear it !”

In fact, the young man’s agitation was so great, and the effect of the distress he had already suffered had told so strikingly upon his aspect, that his friend ceased his remonstrances, and permitted his passion to have free course for a while, ere he addressed him again.

“ Well,” said he at last, “ if such be the case, let it so rest. What has been written we in vain would change. To Kermanshah you shall go, since go you will, but tempting danger is folly, and prudence and precaution may lessen hazard, while they can never injure a good cause. You shall proceed thither in a disguise which will blind every eye, and enable you, unless you betray yourself, to see every thing you want to see without becoming an object of suspicion or inquiry to others. As to this enemy, this priest, formidable as he may be, and unable as you alone would be to cope

with him, there is a power which holds even him under control, and which will protect you effectually, unless your own imprudence should give him an advantage."

The horse-dealer paused, and for some moments seemed to retire into himself; and when he resumed the discourse, it was in a tone so impressive, that Hoosseïn, in some surprise, regarded him with redoubled interest.

"Listen, young man," said he, "and forget not what I now tell you. You have seen, that, poor and insignificant as I may appear, I do, in fact, possess a certain power, be its nature what it may, the effects of which you have already experienced. I now tell you that this power extends in no inconsiderable degree over your enemy the Sheikh-ul-Islam himself; but its influence is affected by circumstances of time and place, so that it cannot at all times be conveniently put in force. The priest too is a deep and an adroit dissembler, so that, while feigning submission and obedience to a control which he dares not openly set at defiance, he would stop neither at falsehood nor treachery, however dark, to gratify revenge or lust. Thus, though able to afford you protection while your conduct is guided by prudence, a single act of inconsiderate exposure might cripple the power I possess, and doom you to destruction in spite of every effort I might make to save you. Reflect, therefore, before you decide. If then

you are resolved to go, and tempt your fate, still listen to my counsel, and be ruled by my directions. You will find they will add both to your safety and efficiency."

Hoossein with eagerness expressed his acknowledgments for his friend's extraordinary zeal and kindness, and, declaring his decided resolution to be guided by his counsel, the conversation terminated for the time.

The evening of that same day saw Hoossein attired as a young fakeer, his body scantily covered with the ragged mantle, his waist bound round by a long rope of goats' hair; his feet shod with sandals, his head swathed in a mass of twisted hair; his limbs, face, and body, smeared with ashes, and bearing the knotted iron-bound club and the usual outfit of a religious wanderer.

"You will now keep in mind my words, and those points I have insisted on," said Allee. "Trust much to the steady guide I send with you. Practice self-control, and live if as you really were a dervish. No man will be the worse for such discipline; and by these means you will, at all events, see whatever is to be seen and learn what can be learned, without risk. When that shall have been done, something more may be tried: at present, by working in the dark, we might do more evil than good."

"Wullah Billah!" growled Caussim, who,

in no placid humour, followed his disguised master. "Wullah Billah! I cannot understand this. What have I done that dirt should be thrown on me this day? Why should I be thrust out of a business, which is mine as well as his? Was not I the first man who volunteered to join him?"

"That you were, *Azeez-e-mun*; that you were," replied Hoossein; "and when I forget that, may Allah forget me! But surely you must comprehend the object of this proceeding? Many a bush will hide one bird, which would give no shelter to two; and there are matters which one man may hope to effect, but which would be spoilt by the interference of another. A needle's eye will receive but one thread; a spear's point will penetrate where a club would fail. All now depends upon secrecy and caution. Were we to be discovered, not only we, but all who look to us with hope, would be lost."

"Ay, ay, you have preached enough to me, but you have not satisfied me," responded Caussim, in the same disconsolate tone, "by your head, you have not. The thread may break; the club may knock down, if it cannot pierce; and as for discovery, in the name of Imaum Hoossein, why should not I make as good a dervish as you?"

Hoossein could not repress a smile, in which the dark eye of Allee seemed to sympathize, as he said,

“Hah, Barikillah! and so you might; and so you shall, perhaps, old comrade, when the proper time comes. But this is Hoossein’s turn; let us try how he succeeds first.”

“Caussim,” said the young man, “what need is there of many words? Well do you know my confidence in you. God knows it is well deserved on your part! Hast thou not saved my life before now?—and do I not know that at this moment it is love for me, and a desire to be near and protect me, that prompt thee to persevere in this request, more even than a sense of duty: but, by that love and zeal thou bearest me, I entreat thee now to say no more. This work is mine; hinder me not from performing it. Remain with our good friend here. Be assured we shall not remain separated long; and when we meet again there will be enough for both of us to do.”

“Well, well, no more about it,” grumbled Caussim, evidently in great distress. “Go thy ways; but should anything befall thee, Hoossein Kerbelai, by the head of the prophet, and by thy own death, I, Caussim, am still true to you; and others shall hear of it, and feel that I am so.”

“And now, Hoossein Kerbelai,” said Allee, “I too say go thy ways. I bid thee good speed. May Allah have you in his holy keeping! Remember my injunctions; confide in him I have told thee of, Allee Reza Attâr; and,

see this talisman. Shouldst thou fall into difficulty, and require the aid of any dervish or mendicant thou mayest meet, there is no true brother who would not recognise and respect the token; and should any circumstance prevent you from producing it, you will command attention by using the words, *Be Hak-e-Koodrut ul Kudeer*."

Hoossein received the talisman, which was merely a bit of parchment or skin bearing a few characters, forming a cipher, which he could make nothing of; so he placed it with care in a secret pocket, among his rags; and his guide, whose name he discovered to be Noor Shah, having now made his appearance, they rose to depart. Caussim could not restrain his distress at this parting: he threw himself upon the ground, embraced his master's knees, and, lifting up his voice, wept aloud. Nor was Hoossein less sincerely, though less clamorously affected; but time pressed, and Allee called on him to depart.

"You must once more submit to the rules of the place, which affect every one but those who have attained a certain high degree in the order to which it belongs; so, that will do, and now, once more, *Khodah Hafiz*!"

CHAPTER II.

THE GUIDE AND THE DRUGGIST.

BLINDFOLDED once more, Hoossein, led by his guide, the same fakeer who had conducted him into the place, retraced the mysterious pathway, and in due time found himself beyond the precincts of his late asylum, and descending the ravine which he remembered on his way thither. After awhile, however, turning to the right, they took another track which led them across the shoulder of a lofty mountain, from whence, had it been daylight, they might have looked down upon the plain of Seyedabad and Kengaver. Holding on their way, by the third hour after daylight, they reached a small village, where their wants were readily supplied, and where they remained until evening.

The taciturnity of the guide, so invincible hitherto, had somewhat relaxed since quitting the vicinity of the cabalistic Elwund; and whether released by special permission from the strict interdict, under which to all appearance he had at first laboured, or whether prolonged

companionship had somewhat broken down restraint, he now replied to the questions of Hoossein, and conversed in terse contention, and phrase indeed, but in terms that proved him to possess much shrewd remark, and sound worldly experience under the ascetic guise he had assumed.

When they reached Kengawer, which was not until near dawn, the fakeer led the way to a hovel without the walls, where, removing a heap of stones, a hole was discovered, and they entered by it into a room of moderate size, in which were leaves and heaps of dry grass, affording no uncomfortable resting place to the wearied travellers. Having satisfied the cravings of their hunger with the remains of provision in their wallets, and washed them down with the water of a rill near at hand, they stretched themselves to sleep, and did not awaken till the sun was some hours high in heaven.

When the light streamed through the crevices of their den, Hoossein observed that a portion of its wall consisted of immense blocks of stone, on which there were inscriptions, though differing in appearance from those of the sepulchre in Elwund.

“Ay,” replied the dervish to his inquiry regarding them, “these stones are no doubt connected with the ruins in the town up yonder, which the Ryots and shopkeepers will tell you are the work of the Jins, like the Chehel Minâr

and many others. As for this place, we may thank the Jins, who keep it clear for those who fear them not. Their name is an admirable talisman to scare fools away."

"And what then are the ruins above?"

"How can I tell the works of the Ghelrs or the Yunanees?*" Some say they are relics of the days of Iskender Roomee;† but others assert, that they belong to a temple built to Eblis, by Jemsheed."

"And are there many of these ruins here-about?"

"No; but you will see many of the works of Ferhaud, the fool who threw himself from the Bessittoon rock, because an old woman told him a lie about his mistress. You have heard of Khooroo Purveez, and his mistress Shireen?"

"Ay, who has not? But I should like to see the spot where the fond lover died. I think I could die in the same manner, were I also assured that my mistress was no more."

"Good! You will have an opportunity to-morrow; for we pass the very spot. It would be but the fool following the madman," responded the dervish, with an unearthly grin. "The fakeers are wiser. The object of our love is Allah alone. The enjoyment we pant for is re-union with his essence; our only ecstasy proceeds from contemplation of his ineffable perfections. But come. This is not

* Greeks.

† Alexander the Great.

the time for mortifications and fasting. Seek we the village. No doubt some pious soul, for Allah's sake, will give us food."

Quitting the ruin, which Hoossein now discovered to be nothing more externally than a heap of stones and sun burned bricks, lying at the foot of a little rising ground, beneath the terrace on which stands the town, the true and false Calunder entered the gate, and passed through the straggling bazaar to a baker's shop, which stood in a retired corner. The well known sounds of *Hoo! Hoo!* intonated from the lungs of the first, soon attracted the attention of the shopkeepers, and among them of the baker, a quiet elderly little man, who while he tendered them the salutation of peace, exchanged a glance with the guide, not unremarked by Hoossein, and went on serving his customers with long flaps of bread steaming hot from his oven.

As soon as the shop was empty, the baker calling a boy to take his place, retired into an inner room, followed by the two travellers. Lifting a quilted curtain, he showed them into a still more snug and comfortable apartment, where seating them on felt carpets, and calling for a calleoon, he began to converse with the guide, in terms which were unintelligible to Hoossein. That they had some reference to himself, however, he easily discovered; as his companion, dropping the mystical tongue, observed that he was a young brother, at present

under probation, and proceeding towards Baghdad, where he might possibly pass a year or two, with the sages of the colleges there. The baker nodded intelligence and acquiescence; the pipes were brought, and a substantial meal was ordered, to which both of the travellers did ample honour.

The conversation was then resumed in the same mystic language, which, though Hoossein could not follow, he discovered that it applied to certain hostile measures dreaded on the part of some influential person. It was plain from this, that the baker was an adept: but after an hour thus passed, he left the travellers to themselves, who prepared for further toil, by the enjoyment of a few more hours of repose.

In the evening their march was recommenced, and continued to the village of Saheneh, where they rested a couple of hours in an open shed, making a meal on the remains of their provision from the baker's hospitality, and they again pursued their way, until the morning sun rose full upon the noble mountain of Bessittoon.

"See," said the dervish, "the work of Ferhaud. Behold the labours of a mortal, visible on that mountain, even at this distance! Yet compare these, among the mightiest efforts of man, with the works of the Almighty. See how these craggy mountains pour contempt upon the scratches at the base. But hush!—silence, and caution!"

As he said these words, the dervish cast a look behind him, and Hoossein, following the direction of his eye, observed a troop of horsemen, who were rapidly coming on behind. "Say not a word, but occasionally respond to my cry," said the guide, who instantly commenced, with a deep voice, to intonate the customary sounds of *Hoo ! Hoo ! Hoo-ool-hak Hoo-ool-hak !* at the same time flourishing his spear-headed club in the very faces of the horsemen as they came up, when elevating his voice still more, he shouted '*Yah Allee ! yah Imaum Hoossein ! Hoo-ool-hak !*

While the cavalcade approached, Hoossein observed, that it consisted of about ten well mounted horsemen, followed by a like number of lightly loaded mules, each bearing also a menial servant, tent-pitcher or groom. The first of the horsemen, who rode a small pacing Arabian, was obviously no man of war, but on either side, as yielding him the place of honour, rode two well appointed cavaliers, mounted on well trained powerful horses, completely armed according to the fashion of the time. Behind, came several others equally well provided, and the whole bore an appearance of being the train of some rich and powerful personage.

As the young man gazed at the party, and scanned its force and aspect, the leading horseman drawing near attracted his more immediate attention, when, to his amazement and

horror, he discovered the features of the very eunuch who had accompanied the Sheikh-ul-Islam on his first visit to Ameenabâd.

So complete was the surprise, that Hoossein lost all remembrance of where he was, and of the part he had to support; and what the consequence might have been is uncertain, had not his guide stepped in to his aid by roaring out his discordant salutation to the travellers, and with a sweep of his club managed to touch the young man on the shoulder.

“Out, dog of a dervish,” shrieked the Aga, in his cracked voice; “out of my path, if thou fearest spear or scimitar!”

“Hoo! Hoo!” roared the dervish with a frightful laugh, as he backed to one side, out of the way of the cavalcade, some of whom gave him abuse, though not one of them ventured to lay hand or stick upon the mendicants. The whole swept on like a breeze over the corn, and the dervish then turned to his companion.

“This is thy self-possession then! Is it thus thou hopest to blind the searching eyes thou wilt meet in yonder city? Is thy mind to be shaken thus at every passing gale?”

“May Allah forbid, comrade!” replied Hoossein, “there are few gales that could shake me as this has done!”

“Ay! knowest thou the vermin then?”

“Know I them! Allah! Was it not *his* baneful presence that first brought evil to our

dwelling, to my own beloved home? And can I see the wretch again without an ardent desire to tread him under foot?"

"Look that he do not that for thee. Thou art about to cross his path, and should he detect thee, no prophet's tongue is needed to tell the consequence. That animal is on his way to Kermanshah, an emissary from his master, for the same object that draws thee thither. Seest thou no cause for caution, for discretion in this?"

"Truly I do comrade, and I am ashamed to think how well I have merited thy rebuke; but practice maketh perfect. I shall mend. Meantime, in God's name, let us push on; the arrival of this fiend is a proof, in addition to all others, how much my presence is wanted in the bazaar of Kermanshah. So, *Bismillah!* let us proceed."

"*Bismillah*, then let us proceed. If warning will serve, thou art warned." So saying, they mended their pace, and soon found themselves beneath the gigantic cliff of Bessittoon. There, in a cell of the caravanserai, they found some comrades of the order, with whom Noor Shah held secret converse for a while; after which, the whole party proceeded to discuss such viands as their wallets supplied, and then each man, who required repose, took his rest as he sat or lay, while the others gave themselves up to smoking and contemplation.

At night, as usual, they resumed the jour-

ney ; but, after pursuing the broad highway for about an hour, Hoossein observed that his guide took a direction more along the base of the mountain, to the right, and he inquired if this were the road to the city.

“ Be guided by your guide,” replied Noor Shah, sententiously ; “ trust to him who is showing thee the safest course.”

Thus admonished, Hoossein followed in silence, until after five or six hours’ walking, they reached the termination of a prodigious cliff, from the foot of which ran a clear stream.

“ Drink,” said the dervish, with one of his scornful laughs ; “ a lover should relish a draught from the fountain of Shireen.”

Hoossein needed no such incentive, for the thirst created by continued exercise was sufficient to recommend a less fresh and delicious beverage. When they had refreshed themselves, Noor Shah turned towards a lofty archway cut in the rock close by.

“ This,” said he, “ is the celebrated *Tauk-i-Bostám*, fabricated by Ferhaud for the pleasure of the fair Shireen ; but it receives other tenants now, as you will find.”

On entering this magnificent hall, Hoossein observed, in a corner, three dervishes, recognisable by their peculiar caps and long hair, seated round a fire of brushwood and weeds.

“ Hoo ! Hoo !” exclaimed Noor Shah, as he advanced.

“ Hoo-ool-Hak !” was the reply ; and the

party made room for the new comers. A pipe was handed to them in silence, which the guide smoked with eagerness; but the odour was too pungent for Hoossein, who excused himself from partaking of the intoxicating stuff, a compound principally of fermented hemp, called in India, *Bhang*.

After a space of nearly a quarter of an hour, some low and indistinct ejaculations were heard to proceed from individuals of the party; and these were the precursors of a dialogue in short sentences, which ensued between Noor Shah and one who probably was the principal person among the strangers. It was maintained, at first, in the mystic language; but afterwards, as if they desired that Hoossein should comprehend what was said, without the medium of interpretation, they adopted the phraseology of ordinary discourse.

"Are any of them arrived?" demanded Noor Shah.

"Yes," responded the other.

"What number, and when?"

"It is said about one hundred and fifty, and they have been arriving in parties, for these three days back."

"Any of them disposed of yet?"

"None. Allee Reza says the Begler-beg objects."

"And where have they been quartered? How are they kept?"

“Some in the Koordish caravanserai; some in private houses; some in chambers behind the bazaar! But it is said, the Gouraûns are crying shame on the Buchtiarees, for feeding the Osmanlee bazaars with captives of their own countrymen; and Roostum Beg’s men are getting alarmed. Allah knows best if they will ever reach Baghdad, by the pass of Kerrend.”

“Good! Inshallah, they shall not;” and after these words the conversation again resumed its mystic dress. Food was then prepared, and was succeeded by the nargilleh and sleep.

“By your soul, comrade,” said Hoosseïn to his guide, in an under tone, when he saw the others disposed of in sleep or meditation. “By your soul, tell me of whom you were speaking just now.” But Noor Shah either heard him not, or was indisposed to reply; for, assuming an attitude of intense abstraction, he only uttered the usual words: “Yah, Hyder! Yah, Allee! Rebbee!” The air of blank disappointment and upbraiding with which the young man regarded his guide, after a second unsuccessful appeal, produced no apparent effect; and, mortified and perplexed, he laid himself down upon his hard pillow, when weariness soon brought sleep to his aid, and, for a time, he forgot his distresses under its balmy influence.

Before evening had set in, Noor Shah urged

on his charge to depart ; and by the time when darkness had fallen and the bazaars were fully illuminated by lights in every shop, they entered the city. In traversing these bazaars, Hoossein, whose eyes were in earnest movement to discover some familiar face, as if in each shop or cell he expected to see some of his missing brethren, was powerfully struck by the variety in character and costume of those who filled these thoroughfares, for here were Koord and Lâc and Lour, and even the turbans and beneesh of the Osmanlee, while here and there a swarthy high featured Arab might be seen mingling with the sober figures of the citizens and shopkeepers.

Here, too, were fakeers and dervishes of every sect and grade, and many were the hoarse yells and blasts of horns which proceeded from individuals of that fraternity. Yet Noor Shah accosting no one, held on without a halt to an opening in the bazaar that led to a lane behind, and stopping at a little door in a wall of mud, he uttered, as he rapped at it, a low peculiar howl. The door soon opened, and the two comrades entered a little court, at the other side of which shone a light in a window of oiled paper.

Crossing this court, which was irregular and full of holes, they entered another passage, on one side of which hung a *purdeh*, or screen ; and this being lifted, they were admitted into a snug well carpeted apartment, at one end of which blazed a cheerful wood fire. Beside

this sat a pleasant looking old man with a rosary in his hand, who was engaged in listening to the items of an account read to him by a secretary.

On the entrance of the two dervishes, the old man nodded to his secretary, who bundled up his papers, and shuffled out of the room; then rising himself with a "Salaam-ul-alei-coom!" he went forward to receive them.

"Welcome!" he said, "a hundred times welcome, ai Noor Shah! your place here has long been empty! you bring light to our old eyes, man!"

To this cordial greeting the impenetrable Noor Shah returned apparently little acknowledgment. A short return of the salute of peace, and a few equally laconic apothegms of a mystic character, uttered with a countenance as hard as rock, was all he vouchsafed to bestow upon the warm hearted druggist, though he nestled himself into the comfortable seat prepared for him by the fire, and spread his hands to the blaze with gestures of satisfaction, which proved him not utterly dead to creature comforts, while the old man bustled about with ready alacrity to provide for his guests.

"And this," said he, when all at length were seated, "this—"

"Is the new Mooreed (disciple);" replied Noor Shah, interrupting his host. "Have you a nargilleh?"

"It is just coming, and of the right sort too. Does he—?"

"No, he has not reached it," was the response.

Two water pipes were then produced, one of which was handed to Noor Shah, the other to Hoossein, who, on tasting it, found it to be charged with pure and fine tobacco, while the fumes proceeding from that which his comrade was pulling at, convinced him that its contents were highly drugged. Its powers of soothing, however, appeared to be considerable; for after sucking it most industriously for full ten minutes, and taking one inordinately long pull before he handed the exhausted instrument to the druggist, and having emitted a grunt of satisfaction along with the remains of the smoke, he settled himself at ease, with one side leaning on his crooked stick, while the twinkle of his keen eye gleamed from under the matted locks, like a distant light in a forest.

"Good," said he, after a considerable period of silence, and the interchange of a few mystic questions and remarks; "it is said the people have arrived? What is known of them?"

"It is true, many of them have been brought hither, poor wretches. Ai Wahi! a sad thing it is to see the children of Allah taken like sheep or cattle to be sold by their brethren! By your soul, my heart turned to water at seeing them!"

"Umph!" growled Noor Shah, "worms of

earth, that come from dust and return to it, must fulfil their destiny. What has become of them ?”

“All are here as yet. These Buchtiarees would have made short work, and passed them off to the Turks at once. My contempt upon these Osmanlees !—and there are some of the girls who would bring high prices.”

“In the name of Allah,” exclaimed Hoossein no longer able to restrain himself, “of whom do you speak ?”

Noor Shah cast a scowling glance at the young man at this interruption, but Allee Reza, the druggist, whose head was formed of softer materials, with a benignant smile, said—

“Be patient, my young friend, and in due time you will know all. Patience compasseth its end, while passion vexeth the soul and shutteth up the eyes of the mind. The people we speak of are, as thou wouldst soon have known, the same whose fate you seek to learn ; we are working for their good. Do not you thwart our efforts by an impatience that may ruin all, while it can profit neither you nor them.”

Hoossein shrunk abashed from a reproof which he felt that he merited, and which, given so mildly, had far more effect upon his feelings than the stern rebukes of his ascetic guide ; while Allee Reza went on to say—

“There are many Osmanlee agents here, and

all are eagerly looking out for bargains ; but there are difficulties in the way. In fact, the feeling here is much against such wholesale dealings. We all know that Lour and Buchtiaree, Lâc and Koord, will have their feuds and their chuppows, and, Bismillah ! let them enjoy them. Let them break each other's heads, and steal sheep and drive cattle to their heart's content ; nay, if they do get hold of a young girl or handsome boy, and sell them without fuss, who cares ? So long as they keep the matter to themselves, the villages and families can spare them. But when they come upon us with a whole village dragged from their beds, and from their murdered parents, and uncles, and brethren, and fill our bazaars and caravanserais with miserable wretches, naked and hungry, crying out ' Amaun, Amaun,' in our ears, Wullah Billah ! it is too much. Kermanshah is neither slave market nor shambles to sell human flesh in ; and whose dogs are these Buchtiarees that dare to throw this shame upon our beards ? By your own head, it will not do ; the good folks here are crying out about it, and say too much has been winked at already ; it will bring a curse upon the place, if allowed to go on.

" They say these wild tribes are no better than the Toorkomans of Kipchawk and the Attock, and are making our city like Khyvah or Bockhara, where regular bazaars are held for the Mussulmauns of Khorasân. My curse be

on the robbers ! But this will not do : the heads of our great tribes here, the Gorauns and the Kelhôres and the Zengenehs have become jealous of such open practice, and have resolved to set their faces against it ; and even our Begler-beg is opening his ears to the cry, although no doubt they have been shut to some purpose hitherto. Thus the Buchtiarees cannot deal. The agents fear to buy, for Hoosseïn Koolee Khan, they say, has sworn they shall not pass Kerrend. And who is Roostum Beg to set himself up against all this ?”

“ So then none have been sold ?”

“ Not one, I believe, unless on the way some secret trafficking may have been attempted ; but there is a little of that perhaps.”

“ Good ; it must be stopped, however. And the girl, the Zâbit’s child or grandchild ?”

“ Of her there are no tidings. We cannot learn whether she has been brought hither or not ; none of the captives know aught about her.”

A groan, which Hoosseïn could not suppress, awakened the compassionate feelings of the honest druggist, who, turning to him, said,

“ Take courage, young friend, in the absence of known evil we may hope for good. If she whom you search for, be not in Kermanshah, she runs the less risk ; and by the blessing of Allah, you may trust to find her yet.”

“Oh! that I could think so, father!” said the young man, strongly moved. “Oh! that I could feel convinced she was still in the hands of that villanous robber; even that would be something, for he would shield her from harm, for the sake of gain. But the Sheikh-ul-Islam, or a Turkish harem, is equally ruin to her, and death to me! Oh! would to Allah this suspense were over, for scarcely can I endure it longer!”

“My curses on the Sheikh-ul-Islam!” responded the druggist, with a bitterness which did not appear to belong to his nature, “fear not for him; in that quarter she will be cared for. It is here we must watch that she slip not through our fingers. Yet that cannot easily happen.”

“May Allah bless you, father, for that saying; your words are like salve to a fretted sore, they soothe my very heart! But could we not see these captives? from them we might learn; oh, they would tell me all.”

“Again, my son, again impatient and imprudent at the same time. Think you that a knowledge of your presence here would help these poor captives, or aid your object? Believe you, that these same Buchtiarees would relish *your* communicating with the captives in their charge? Nay, would they not instantly seek to add you to their number? Your eagerness blinds your judgment.”

“Or probably,” interposed Noor Shah, in his cold sardonic tone, “he thinks it might aid his views to fall into the hands of the worthy Aga Jeewah, who is now within the city, as he knows by the civil meeting we had with that admirable person on our way hither.”

Again did Hoossein hang his head. Yet the painful workings of his bitter anxiety found no relief either in the cautious maxims of his host, or the taunting rebukes of his guide. The conversation was soon after interrupted by the entrance of a substantial meal, at which no symptoms of self-denial appeared on the part of Noor Shah, who, moreover, indulged liberally in draughts of that seducing beverage, which true Mussulmauns are forbidden to make use of; and the result, so far as might be conjectured from appearances, was a state of perfect placidity. Little further, however, transpired on the subject of the captives, and the discourse, after lapsing for a time into the mystic phraseology, dropped altogether.

A deep intonation of some of the usual ejaculations issued at intervals from the der-vish, who seem plunged in total abstraction; while, on the other side of the fireplace now filled with little more than embers, the eyes of the good druggist, who had likewise assumed the attitude of contemplation and ease, began to close more and more frequently; and after twice or thrice starting, and catching

at his fallen beads as well as the half muttered prayer which had been hushed together with the dropping *tusbee*, he bade his guests good night, and retired.

Hoossein, whose mind, uneasy and harassed, had busied itself, while the others were thus employed, in brooding over the miseries of his fellow villagers and the possible fate of his beloved mistress, seeing that nothing further was to be gathered from his companion, covered himself with the *lahoff*, which a servant brought for his use, and sought for comfort in repose. His example was soon followed by his contemplative guide, as he, too, on the succeeding morning appeared enveloped in the same fashion, and gave sufficient proof of sound sleep by the most prodigious snores.

CHAPTER III.

THE BAZAAR.

EARLY on the morrow, when the sun had awakened the sleepers of Kermanshah, and its multitudes had gone forth to their daily labour, or to supply their daily wants, Allee Reza among others repaired to his *dookan*,* in the bazaar just in front of his private house; while his two guests, having smoked their pipe, sat on the raised clay terrace in front, looking out upon the crowd of comers and goers, of buyers and sellers, of the preyers and the preyed upon, who constitute the population of a large city.

“By your soul, Aga,” whispered Hoossein earnestly to his host, “the caravanserais must be open by this time. Could we not take a turn through them just now, and try if we can see some of the unfortunates? I ask only to see them, Aga, nothing more; by your own revered head, I will be prudent; not a word will I utter, not a movement will I make that you can disapprove.”

* Shop.

“La-illah-il-ullah !” exclaimed the druggist, lifting up his eyes, “what a fancy, to think of old Allee Reza Attaur taking a run round the bazaars, like a madcap, an hour after sunrise, and poking his nose into all the caravan-serais like a news gatherer ! Young man, you must have lost your wits ! Is your brain sound ?” And the old man evinced somewhat more crustiness than belonged to his nature at a proposal so contrary to his usual sober habits. But observing his young friend mortified by so pointed a refusal, he added,

“My son, you have forgotten my lecture last night upon patience. ‘It is the gate of joy,’ saith the Sage, ‘while precipitation leads to sorrow ; it may be a bitter tree, but it bears sweet fruit.’ But come, be satisfied, two hours hence I shall myself go forth ; and if you promise to keep within due bounds, I will prevail on your friend to let you accompany me. We will visit the poor captives, and, please God, we may learn some good news.”

Alas ! how often does age appear to forget the days that are gone, when the blood, which now runs feebly in its shriveled channels, was shot with the ardour of youth, and coursed furiously through the veins ! How seldom does it sympathize with the tortures of the youthful heart, when its own has become dull to the pains of disappointment.

Bitter, indeed, was the cud of patience which

Hoossein had to chew for far more than the two promised hours, which appeared to him like ages, as the old druggist continued slowly serving customer after customer, giving each a lengthy direction as to the use or abuse of the article sold, with many digressions regarding the hot or cold nature of his various remedies, and entering into the minutest detail of each account with a persevering precision, which made the poor lad heart-sick. But resolved to call down no further rebukes for impatience, and to show that he might be trusted, if for no other purpose than that of gaining greater liberty, he compelled himself to sit still and smooth his brow, evincing outwardly no symptom of disturbance. At length, however, came his reward. Noor Shah, on being appealed to, made no objection, but said,

“He knows both his danger, and the means of shunning it; he knows that success depends upon firmness and discretion. Let him ponder this well, and remember that if few words be worth a miscâl of gold, *silence* is worth a maun. In the name of Allah, let him come.”

Accordingly, the shop being left in charge of a lad, the two comrades followed the druggist through the bazaar towards the caravanserai Koordee.

“Know you these fellows?” demanded Noor Shah, in an under voice, of Hoossein, as they passed a group of wild figures who were cheapening arms at a shop.

Hoossein turned and saw the well known Buchtiaree dress and appointments, and could almost have believed he recognised some of his old opponents in the Yeelâks of Ameenabâd. His reply, however, was only a significant glance, and on they proceeded until at length they stood at the entrance of the caravanserai ; where, just in the gateway, among a concourse of muleteers, and grooms, and porters, and petty dealers, who were constantly coming and going, they recognised another party of their Buchtiaree acquaintances, obviously on guard, and carefully examining with their eyes all who went in or out.

On approaching this place, Noor Shah began to tune his horn, and, after a few sturdy blasts, bolted out a long string of those unintelligible ejaculations with which the fraternity are pleased to edify the uninitiated. The druggist, a well known character of the place, entered without exciting attention ; but the Buchtiarees flocked around the dervishes with a superstitious reverence, importuning them for talismans, charms, and blessings. To get rid of these gentlemen occupied some time, during which, the druggist made inquiries at the *se-raidar* about the captives.

The chambers occupied by them were pointed out to him, and he found these watched by several of their captors. As a person desirous of examining the slaves, with a view to pur-

chase, he was readily permitted to see them; and while he was seated, thus engaged, in an outer chamber, the two dervishes came up, and joined the group, with the freedom assumed by their privileged order; so that Hoossein found himself at once in presence of several of his fellow villagers who were now brought forward to be examined.

“Here is a *Juán*. Here is a youth for you, Aga,” said the person, who took on himself the charge of puffing the goods. “Look at him, only; there is strength, there is beauty! cheeks like roses, and limbs like Roostum’s! Make of him what you will; he is fit for anything, furosh or Jeloodar, Peishkhidmut or Pehlewan.”

It was not without deep emotion that Hoossein, in this young man, discovered an intimate companion of his own, a grand-nephew of the good old Hadjee, and consequently a near relative of his own Ausieh!

“See, Aga, here is something more to your taste, perhaps. Old men love young attendants, and here is one scarcely to be matched; only fifteen, too: see these cheeks, as smooth and as red as a peach; and that dimpled, beardless chin. Wullah! he is like a woman; but no woman is he, Aga. What a *Gholaum-batchah* (a page) he would make for a great Khan! What a bath attendant for any one!”

Thus did the man run on, as one after an-

other of the male villagers were produced before the Attaur ; and Hoosseïn, though kept on the rack with excitement and distress, restrained his feelings wonderfully. More than once, did the old man put such questions to the prisoners as might lead them to describe the particulars of their capture, and the number made prisoners ; but as soon as he touched upon such topics, the spokesman interrupted the inquiry, and called for another subject.

At length the druggist, in the hopes of some more favourable chance, told the agent that he had seen men and boys enough ; that he now desired to see his female wares. To this, as in all such cases, some small demur was made ; but the druggist, well experienced in such matters, rose and told them, that he had no time for coquetting, he was a man of business, he had to act for others ; so if they had a mind to deal, Bismillah ! let them produce their best goods at once, otherwise *Khodah Hafiz !*"

This alternative, pronounced in a calm, indifferant tone, and enforced by a movement to rise, had an immediate effect ; for the Buchtiarees, who had begun rather to despond about the disposal of their captives, were too anxious to secure a customer, to permit the old gentleman to depart ; so after a little more fuss, in spreading screens and curtains, to shut out the spot from public view, some females were brought forward.

And now were the sympathies and eager expectations of Hoossein excited more powerfully still. To exclude from the place der-vishes, holy men, was out of the question; no one would have ventured on the dangerous measure of provoking their displeasure by such an affront; and the young man, thus privileged, had to endure the pain and mortification of seeing the sisters and daughters of his friends, creatures whom he had known and loved from infancy, the playmates and intimates of his beloved Ausieh, exposed to the stare of strangers, like beasts of the field, for sale.

But though many were produced, and some of sufficient comeliness, the eyes of Hoossein still looked for more; and the druggist, comprehending his wishes, addressed the chief official, in terms somewhat slighting the female charms he had produced, and expressed his fears that, unless there were something yet to come of far greater attractions than what had hitherto been shown, and which might induce a purchaser to think of the other slaves, he feared there was little hope of his coming to a bidding. Thus pressed, the chief negociators conferred together; and intimating to the druggist that he should have reason to be satisfied, the signal was given, and a veiled female, of slender shape and promising stature, was led forward.

The heart of Hoossein beat wildly as she advanced; so great was his disorder, that

though he experienced a secret belief that the figure before him was not that of his mistress, his hopes and his fears were so balanced, that he could scarce have declared whether relief or disappointment prevailed, on the veil being removed, when features, beautiful indeed, and well known, but not those of Ausieh, appeared from behind it.

The sigh, which escaped from his pent-up breast, conveyed to the druggist the fact, that this was not the maiden sought for. So, after a short examination of the poor weeping girl, to whom he addressed a few kind words; and receiving replies from the agent to some of the ordinary questions respecting her price, he rose, shaking his head, and said—

“I fear the Kiayah must wait till the next arrival; for if this be your best, there is nothing here that would do for him.”

“The Kiayah!” repeated the agent. “Stay, Aga; by your soul, stay a moment; perhaps we may suit you yet. There is one remaining still—a pearl, indeed, such as is seldom found in any sea; a rose, such as Gourjistân, or Feringistan, cannot match; one moment, Aga, and she comes.”

Again, accordingly, was a veiled female led forward; and again did Hoosseïn hold his breath, while his heart beat as if it would burst its bounds. Nor was it this time without some cause; for though, on the veil’s removal, h

saw not Ausieh, he found that it had covered the features of a very lovely girl, another grandchild of the old Zâbit's, the daughter of one of his sons, and who had been his Ausieh's favourite companion and playfellow. And now came the struggle, not only of indignant feeling, but of almost irrepressible eagerness; for he felt, that from this young creature he might learn all he burned to know—the fate of his mistress; yet to ask the question was forbidden, was impracticable.

The druggist saw the excitement and the struggle, and dreading the result, he once more rose, and said to the agent :

“ This then is your pearl, your fairest rose. It is well. She is lovely; but the Kiayah is a nice judge. In the meantime, may Allah keep you; should anything further come to hand, let me hear of it. Allee Reza Attaur is well known throughout the bazaar.” With these words, he quitted the place.

“ Depend upon it, my son, the maid you seek is not with these people. Had she been there, she would have been produced. You might have seen how eager they were to secure a purchaser, like me, who talked big and was fastidious.” Thus said the druggist to Hoossein, who after lingering in vain about the caravanserai had returned to the shop.

“ Oh, if I could but ask two questions from that girl !” responded the young man with a

heavy groan. "She knows all, and could tell me everything, I die to learn!"

"It may be so, my son; yet it may be otherwise. How likely is it that they were separated, in the bustle and the fray, and that they have not seen each other since! But to speak with her, at present, is impossible, the attempt would be fraught with heavy risk to every one concerned; a risk you have no right to bring on others, even were you reckless as to yourself. No; patience, I say again, my son! Let time do its work, and dread not the result; no evil to be apprehended from delay can be so great, as that which may be caused by precipitation."

Alas! patience again! that bitter food, so oft prescribed to stay the pining stomach of anxiety! Hoossein was sick of it, yet still forced to feed, a little longer, on the nauseous diet. He was, in fact, learning under his dervish's weeds, severe, but useful lessons of self-denial and mortification. Yet did he not submit to all this suffering without a struggle. "Necessity," saith the proverb, "sharpeneth wit, and hunger maketh wise the fool."

Musing over all that he had seen and heard, he could discover no good reason for trusting entirely to the efforts of others, without attempting a single exertion in his own behalf. Dangers doubtless were around him, but the disguise which had concealed him,

when in company with others, would not be less effectual when alone. He had now seen enough of the manners of the dervishes, as he thought, and had caught sufficient of their phraseology, to impose upon the vulgar. And as for his own prudence, what young lover ever doubted that? He resolved, therefore, to sally forth, and seek for favourable chances of gaining his ends instead of waiting till they should reach him through other channels.

He had remarked the fondness of the Buchtiarees for many trifling articles, with which Noor Shah had provided himself; such as beads, bits of clay from various shrines, rags of cloth, papers having characters scrawled upon them, and cabalistic figures, all of which were believed to possess some high virtue of infinite value to the wearer. With these he resolved to supply himself; and gathering certain scraps of writing from the druggist's shop; bits of red cloth; the beads of an old rosary, and other such articles, towards evening, he left the house to lay out a portion of the little money he possessed, in adding to his store such things as were likely to promote his object.

Having completed his purchases, though not without being stared at a good deal by the shopkeepers, who usually found in persons of his profession beggars, rather than buyers of their goods, he walked round the bazaars, by way of practice, in order to make ac-

quaintance with the streets and ways of the town, so as to facilitate his movements on the morrow. The excitement, arising from hope in the success of his project, enabled him to bear with more composure the long dull evening which succeeded, and which, unenlivened by any fresh intelligence, was passed by the druggist and his companion, together with another brother of the fraternity, who appeared to have merely been attracted by the scent of a good meal, in mystical communings, long contemplative pauses, bursts of frantic ejaculations, smoking, wine drinking, and sleep.

Before his dervish companions had slept off the effects of their debauch, though not before the honest and more sober druggist was already in his shop, did Hoossein leave the house, and assuming the free careless gait of the mystic fraternity, proceeded towards the Koordish caravanserai. In his demeanour he imitated what he had remarked in the conduct of Noor Shah, and other fakeers; occasionally, and as it were from some incontrollable impulse, ejaculating the monosyllable *Hak!* or repeating the *Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!* for many times together, yet with an expressive calmness of countenance, as if the mind was unconscious of the effect of its own workings upon its carnal tabernacle.

If any one addressed him while feigning this rapt state, no attention was made to the appeal;

if alms were tendered, they were received without thanks, as they were bestowed without solicitation ; and thus did the neophyte progress, gazed at with reverence, but unchallenged, to the gate of the Koordish caravanserai.

All here was in the busy hum of morning activity. Travellers were mounting and setting off, or waiting in their riding gear for the moment of departure. There were beasts of burthen, mules, yaboos, camels in the act of being loaded by their swearing roaring drivers ; horses and baggage cattle driven out to water, or returning in strings, with the grooms, or Cherwadars,* singing their wild songs, as they sat lazily on the backs of the leaders. Groups at the doors of the several chambers were smoking in the early sunshine. Bales of goods, and packages of various descriptions were rolled or tossed to and fro by the sturdy arms of porters or muleteers, while merchants or clerks stood by to watch the proper disposal of their goods.

In this bustling scene lounged Hoosseïn, with his satchell of charms and relics, and his studied mystical shouts ; nor did he fail soon to attract attention. Prudent enough, when unmaddened by extreme emotion, and thrown upon his own resources, instead of proceeding at once to the side where his real business lay, he stood for a while at the gate, displaying some few of his talismans and beads,

* Muleteers.

in an old copper vessel, and mumbling some Arabic prayers, mingled with sounds, as like those he had heard used by his companions as he could make them. He was soon surrounded by idlers, who put to him a multitude of questions. Some old way-farers, after listening for a few moments, would give an "umph" of contempt for the young dervish, and pass on; others less knowing, or more superstitious, gazed with respect upon even a juvenile aspirant of his mysterious order; while a few requested charms, talismans, or a sacred bead or two to bind upon their person, in order to secure success in some desired object, or to preserve them from some dreaded evil.

Among the rest several of the Buchtiaree band came lounging up, and gazing with stolid curious faces upon the saint, who, gaining courage from success, proceeded on towards other groups, gathering an offering, or giving a terse reply to some question, but avoiding conversation, without affecting rudeness, until at length, by a natural circuit, he reached the side of the square where the captives were kept.

Of these many of the men were sitting in little groups, before the doors of the cells, smoking and stretching themselves in the morning sunshine, watched only by a few of their guards, who interfered little with their movements; and the young man's heart beat quicker, as he saw, in a manner within his

grasp, the opportunity he so ardently sought for of learning more than he yet knew of the fate and condition of his surviving fellow villagers. While he was approaching, some of them had risen, and even came forward, as it seemed, to meet him; and he was meditating how he might address them in such a way as to avoid the risk of having his secret betrayed through surprise or other mischance, when he observed three or four of the Buchtiarees, who had been conversing together at some distance, also coming up.

His fears were instantly aroused. There was nothing left, however, but to stand his ground; and his apprehensions were speedily removed by the demeanour of the men, whose looks betrayed neither anger nor suspicion, but who talked eagerly with one another as if they were continuing some discussion which had already been going on.

“Ay,” said one of them, as they came within hearing, “that is the very thing; no doubt this Calunder is the man who can do it. Bismillah! let us ask him at once.”

Thus relieved, Hoosseïn had time to regain his equanimity, and prepare for what should occur.

“Selaam-ul-aleicoom! Dervish, may Allah be ever in your path; may his shadow protect you, Inshallah!” said the spokesman. “Thou art, Mashallah! a holy man; a servant of God, who knowest the past, and doubtless seest into

the future. Here are some Mussulmauns, also creatures of Allah, and servants of his prophet, on whose name be blessings ! who are about to take a journey, to commence an undertaking ; and they desire much to know whether it will be fortunate ; whether this is the time to commence it or not."

It did not require much reflection, on the part of Hoossein, to remind him that no journey or enterprise about to be undertaken by the guard of these captives, could be uninteresting to him ; and he at once resolved to profit by the opportunity so singularly thrown in his way, of learning their intentions. Preserving, therefore, the impassive rigidity of feature he had assumed, he replied,

" Children of Adam ! who are ye, whence come you, and whither would ye go ?"

" Come with us, dervish, to our munzil, and thou shalt hear all ; and we swear by the head of Allee, that if thou canst assist us, ye shall not lack reward. Come, this place is too public for our business."

Hoossein, scarcely believing his good fortune, followed the men to the cell which they occupied ; and a nargilleh having been prepared and smoked, the spokesman began as follows :

" I know not, O dervish, whether thou art an entire stranger in these parts, or hast travelled among the tribes and mountains of

Buchtiaree and Louristan, from the first of which we draw our origin. Thanks be to Allah, we are Buchtiarees; ay, and of the tribe of Suhooneh."

"Say on, man," replied Hoossein: "the country and the people are known to me."

"It is well. Then must it also be known unto the dervish, that between these tribes frequent quarrels arise and feuds ensue, in the course of which villages are chuppowed and captives taken. These captives, as is our wont, we sell, save when ransomed at as good a price as we can obtain from purchasers. Such a quarrel as I speak of having ended in a chuppow, on the part of our chief and ourselves, many captives were taken, and they have been brought hither, under our charge, to be disposed of."

The man paused here; but Hoossein, though his eagerness to question him almost overcame his prudent resolutions, refrained from making any remark, beyond a word of intelligence and assent. The other continued:

"It appears, however, that we must have left our homes under an evil influence, for not only have we made no sales to speak of, but we are regarded here, as it would seem, with an evil eye, which hinders all purchasers from approaching us. Nay, threats have been made, it is said, that should any one buy, he may make up his mind to the loss of his purchases

by force or fraud. Only yesterday came there a rich merchant of the bazaar, who made all sorts of inquiries, saw all our best and comeliest captives, and was satisfied, as he believed; but, lo! we hear nothing further of him! Our dillauls (brokers) are all in despair; our means are getting low, and something must be done to turn our captives into money, or we shall go back to our homes with empty purses and blackened faces."

"If your purses be empty, you will have the less to fear, for money is the cause of fear. Ye say ye left home under an unlucky influence; how was it with you in the chuppow?"

"Our luck was perfect, our star was high; we lost nothing, gained everything. If ill luck there were, it was none of ours."

"Ay, thou hast said it: ill luck there was and ill luck there will be, for others were joined in the matter with thy brethren and thee, and the curse of their fortune overshadows all."

"Allah! what sayest thou?"

"Thou knowest that the chuppow of which thou hast spoken was provoked by no ordinary cause. Between the people who were spoiled and thy tribe there was no blood. Thy master did the evil work of another, and the evil will fall on his own head."

"In the name of Allah, dervish, what evil work dost thou talk of? What meanest thou by these words?"

“Thou saidst I knew the past. Thou didst say well. Thou wilt find still more is known to me. But thou thyself knowest well at whose instance thy master put his foot into the stirrup in this affair. Thou art not ignorant of its objects; that a portion of the spoil was already bargained for. Thou knowest why the bargain remained unfulfilled. Is there more needed? Thou knowest that a poor weak, unoffending old man was to be destroyed, and his child carried off, to gratify the revenge and the lust of a hypocrite. And canst thou doubt whence comes the evil influence that pursues thee?”

“Soobhân-ullah! what miracle is this?” exclaimed the man in amazement and alarm. “In the name of Allah! what art thou, der-vish?”

“A fragment of earth, illuminated by the light and the truth of the Most High! Hoo-ool Hak! Hoo-ool Hak! Hoo-ool Hak! The past has been shown to thee, and now to tell the future. Where is that old man’s child?”

“Wullah Billah! *Hoozrut*,* we know not. She is not and never was with us; and what has become of her I cannot tell.”

This was an important point gained, and Hoossein felt the relief; but, having expe-

* The presence, majesty, power, an epithet of respect applied to sovereigns and holy men.

rienced the value of prudence, he dared not to press his inquiry further at the time. Solemnly addressing the spokesman, he said,

“ It was thy master’s evil destiny that led him to engage in such an enterprise, which, originating in unprovoked oppression and rapacity, could bring no good fortune on those concerned in it. If he seeks to shake off the curse, let him purge himself of the cause. Let him restore the maiden to her surviving friends, and thus avert future and heavier evils. For thyself, hope not that good fortune can attend on any portion of an accursed enterprise ; but signify what ye require ; and as the past has been already expounded to thee, thou shalt learn the future.”

“ May your favour never diminish, Huzrut ; it is as follows : seeing that nothing is to be done here, and that the road, by Kerrend, is beset, it has been proposed that we four shall start with six of our choicest captives, three girls and three lads ; and taking the mountainous road, by Harasin, to traverse the Feilee country, entering it by the Pasces of Zarnah and Ghilan ; and, reaching the Turkish territories, where we should be safe, and not only be able to sell what we carry with us, but strike a bargain, perhaps, for more. In the meantime, two of our number would return to our master and inform him of how matters stand here, and let him judge what is best to be done.”

“ And when do ye purpose to set out ? ”

“ That, Huzrut, will depend upon your favour ; we hope, through your profound knowledge, to obtain a *fâl*,* or a propitious hour.”

“ It is well ; and, Inshallah ! ye shall not be disappointed. But mistake not ; responses, such as ye desire, are the fruit of prayer and penance. The mortal frame must suffer, ere the spirit can soar clear of its earthy dross, and rejoice in the knowledge which it sighs for. To-morrow, at this time, thou shalt know what the Almighty deigns to reveal.”

With these words he rose, and with the true blunt demeanour and swinging step of a dervish quitted the chamber, followed by the four gaping, awe-struck Buchtiarees.

Full of what he had discovered, Hoosseïn hastened to the druggist's house, and told him all that had occurred. While yet discoursing on the plans of the Buchtiarees, Noor Shah came in.

“ Thou hast played an adventurous game, my son,” said the druggist. “ That success has attended thee so far is due to the mercy of Allah ! But think not that thy friends were ignorant of the designs of these men, though I must confess that thy discoveries have added usefully to their knowledge ; and their application to thee, this day, may be turned to great advantage.”

* An omen, or prediction, to guide the conduct of the Seeker ; corresponding with the ‘ Sortes Virgilianæ.’

“Umph,” growled Noor Shah, with his customary harsh sententiousness. “Madmen will sometimes pass in safety through the fire, where the wise would scorch their feet. The insanity of the youth hath, for this time, gone before our wisdom; but beware, young man. The hand of intrepidity may pluck the rose of safety from the same precipice where the foot of impatience and folly gives way and betrays its owner.”

“But give ear, Allee Reza,” continued he; and the two adepts conversed together for a while, in a subdued voice, making use of the mystical terms of their sect.

At length, the druggist again addressed his young guest:

“Listen to me, my son. Thy rashness, as thy friend hath truly termed it, has, for this time, turned to a good account; not, as I have said, that we were ignorant of what was going on, but that thy information will enable us, the more effectually, to baffle their schemes. The wicked shall be taken in their own snares. They shall go forth upon their journey, but it will lead them whither they look not. Thou shalt keep thy appointment with them, my son; let them want neither *fâl*, nor *hour*. They may go as leaders of captives, but as captives themselves shall they return; as for thy friends, have thou no fear. These robbers shall be met withall, and by those who will not fail to give a good account of them, and a ransom shall be

provided for those who remain here from a source which their guards little dream of ; and now see, thy friend will instruct thee as to thy further proceedings. Mashallah ! couldst thou but throw off the world, and its follies, what a dervish wouldst thou make !”

Noor Shah then proceeded to point out to Hoossein the manner in which he was to deal with the Buchtiarees, in taking out a *fál* for them ; showed him how to use the sacred *Tus-bee*, or chaplet of beads, and lent him a copy of the works of Hafiz, which had often been made use of for the same purpose. After mature consideration and calculation, he then mentioned an hour to be indicated to them, as that in which they should leave the city, and finally cautioned the young man, generally, to say as little as possible, and adhere as closely as he could to the short and apothegmatic sentences made use of by the silent fraternity of dervishes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KOORDISH CARAVANSERAI.

THE morrow came at length, and Hoosseïn, prepared with his charms, spells and talismans, took his way to the caravanserai, where he found the Buchtiarees anxiously waiting his arrival. Hurrying him to their chamber, where he was received with all the respect they could evince, a calleeoon was provided, which he smoked with imperturbable gravity; and after sundry deep-toned ejaculations, he remained gazing upon the ground in silence and utter abstraction. But the Buchtiarees, although fear of offending the holy man subdued their natural rudeness, and held them mute for a while, were too impatient to suffer this state of suspense very long; and their spokesman, at length gathering courage, ventured to observe, that,

“If it were not displeasing to the *Hoozrut*; if the *Hoozrut* held in mind his promise, his servants had hopes of a *fâl*.”

“It is well, children of Adam,” said the pretended dervish in solemn accents. “Ye desire to look into futurity, ye seek for an omen

of success ; ye shall obtain it. Ye would learn the fitting hour for commencing your undertaking ; it shall be made known to you. Profit now by what Allah permits to be disclosed. Behold this sacred tusbee ! the clay which forms these beads was moistened by the blood of sainted Allee, the vicar of the Most High. Behold, too, this volume ; it contains the *Dewan* of the divine Khojah, whose mystic writings beam with the light of eternal truth, and from whose burning words have been drawn a thousand true presages. Choose ye between these venerable objects, and declare to which of them ye desire to appeal."

Smitten with awe at the sight of these mysterious articles, which were produced with no small ceremony from coverings of embroidered silk, the robbers whispering consulted together, and signified at length that to the rosary they desired to refer the fate of their intended enterprise. Hoosseïn then called for a *Menkal*, or brazier of coals, which being brought, he took from his wallet a little packet, and threw a portion of its contents upon the red charcoal. These instantly blazed up on high, and filled the chamber with an aromatic, but pungent smoke, which powerfully affected the eyes. Over this he held the chaplet, muttering for some minutes together a string of sentences, resembling prayers or invocations. The process continued for nearly ten minutes, during

which time profound silence was kept by all the party, who, each and all, sat motionless, gazing at the flame and the sacred beads on which he believed his fate to depend. At length, the flame having sunk, and the beads being withdrawn, the young man addressed his auditors as follows :

“ Children of Adam, approach and prove your destiny. Behold this holy chaplet, prepared as it has been for this solemn occasion ; observe each seventh bead has assumed a darker hue ; let him among you, whom ye shall select, approach blind-folded, and, while thus held out by this servant of Allah, let him seize the string at random ; the number of beads below and above the point so seized will afford the means of indicating what ye seek to know.”

Thus called upon, after a short struggle between the reluctance of awe, and their desire to obtain the response, the spokesman came forward, and having his eyes bound in the manner prescribed, with a form of invocation, was directed to seat himself near the pretended dervish. In this manner, while the latter held the upper end of the tusbee, he grasped its lower extremity with his left hand, and catching at it in the centre with the thumb and finger, exclaimed,

“ Bismillah irruhmân-irruheem !” to which the dervish solemnly responded, “ Mubârick

bashud Inshallah ! May it be fortunate !” and then counted off the beads below the fingers.

“ It must be nine times repeated,” said Hoossein, “ for in a matter of consequence like this, fallible mortals must not trust to one trial ; assurance lies in numbers, and that of *nine* has power.”

This powerful number of *fáls* having been duly completed, the man removed the bandage from his eyes and retired, and Hoossein proceeded to sum up the result and deliver the response, which he did as follows,

“ Children of Adam ! know, that the omen ye have sought, betokens difficulty and danger, but precludes not success ; for comparing the indicating numbers with those of the *fáls* taken, there remains not a doubt of your reaching your destination, while, the circumstance of your agent having, thrice running, grasped the chaplet within one grain of the upper dark coloured bead, indicates the occurrence of obstacles, which it will demand both courage and perseverance to surmount. Does this content you ? or seek ye another trial ?”

The men, evidently at a loss held counsel again together. “ Can the Huzrut give any notion of the kind of danger which his servants may have to encounter ?”

“ That which Allah deigns to shadow forth can alone be declared by his servant. But are

ye not men? Are ye to be daunted by the fore-knowledge of difficulty? See ye not that the season advances? Lies not your way among the mountains, where men are few, but ice and snow abound? Is there not, in this promise of obstacles and difficulty, sufficient to call forth your full vigour, and justify the omen which predicts hardship and danger?"

The men's countenances cleared up at once. "Oh! as for the snow, Mashallah! we know what it is made of; we have no fear of it. And now, Hoozrut, for the fortunate hour!"

"That also has been considered, and what has now declared itself confirms the result of previous calculations. Let this day and the coming night be spent in such preparations as ye require; but see that the following noon find you not within these walls. The most auspicious hour is the first after the Numâz-e-Soobh.* May the omnipotent guide you aright." With these words the pretended dervish unceremoniously departed; but not before his anxious clients had slipped into his satchel sundry coins, the value of which he sought not to inquire; and he then, at once, made his way homewards to report the success of his arrangements.

"Barikillah!" said Allee Reza, as the young man related what had passed; "thou wilt be a

* Morning prayer.

worthy brother some day yet. Thou hast the true dervish fire in thee, which needs but rousing to burst into a blaze. But there is time enough. Thy call has not yet come. Thou hast done well, Mashallah ! and to-morrow, please God, we shall hear yet more. In the meantime those thieves must be provided for. Next time ye see them, Inshallah ! it will be with blackened faces and hands bound."

During the whole forenoon did Hoosseïn ponder over the events of the last three days. His mind was in a ferment, his brains bewildered. He felt himself in a position which sorely perplexed him. Physically he was at liberty, for he laboured under no personal constraint ; yet was he assuredly under a moral bondage, more powerful than that of bodily enthrallment. His mind, his power of action was fettered, and so completely mystified did he feel, that there appeared to him no mode of escape. Yet, after all, was escape to be desired ? might he not be in the best, probably the only path for obtaining the object of all his wishes ? Was he not certainly and almost miraculously aided in these objects ? Of himself could he do any good ?

The power which aided him was beyond his comprehension ; indeed viewless, yet pervading as a spiritual essence, it appeared to confine him in an atmosphere of mystery ; yet he felt its

benign agency, and had substantial intercourse with some of its many agents. He was, in short, under the influence of a spell, which, while it wafted him towards the object of his wishes, he felt in no wise inclined to resist. It would be time enough, he thought, for resistance when evil should appear.

Still he was restless; and goaded into motion by anxiety, as evening approached, he again quitted his munzil, and strolled forth through the bazaars. His eyes were amused by the various groups that thronged the street or clustered round particular shops; and the roar of tongues and the rapid action of the speakers distracted his mind, for the moment, from its secret uneasiness.

Wandering on, he reached the shop of a *Sherbet-furoosh*, happily situated at a point where the bazaars crossed, and whose bowls of stewed prunes and apricots were devoured with double relish by the crowd of customers, as they listened to the story of an itinerant dervish, who, with extravagant action, was narrating the fortunes of some Prince and Vizier's daughter. Hoossein paused to listen with the rest, and, as he leaned against the raised terrace of an opposite shop, he became so much interested in the manœuvres of a rival Jin and Peri, who took part with or against the lovers, as suited the story-teller's purpose, that

for the time, he half forgot alike his grief and where he was. The *kissago*,* however, according to the usage of his craft, after having once or twice extracted some copper pieces from the by-standers, who stood drinking in his words with mouths agape and grins of delight, stopped abruptly at a point of the greatest interest, giving notice that on the following night he should return and finish his tale.

The bustle of the departing crowd awakened Hoosseïn from his dream, and he also was turning to depart, when his eye fell upon a group of three men, who appeared to be watching him attentively. They were plainly and even coarsely habited, and yet there was a peculiarity in their air, which the young man detected at once as pertaining to the *Nowkerbâb* or military cast, and he could not repress a feeling of alarm, as he found himself so distinctly the object of their scrutiny.

To return their stare, however, being none of his business, he soon left the place to them, and continued his aimless wanderings, sometimes amusing himself as before, or turning into a caravanserai, and examining the groups of merchants and travellers of various countries seated at the doors of their respective chambers. In this way, more than one hour insensibly elapsed, when he found him-

* Story-teller.

self, without any premeditated purpose, at the gate of the Koordish caravanserai.

To resist entering, though without object as without hope, was beyond his virtue. The evening being far spent, the crowd of comers and goers had disappeared, and the bustle within the square was over. Darkness prevailed, save where the light of a fire, from the open doorway of some cell, threw its gleam across the way, and lighted up the figure of a solitary muleteer or horse-keeper, returning from the stables to their munzil.

Across this court, threading his way among the piles of bales and various goods with which it was strewed, and the groups of ruminating camels, which from want of room had been disposed in circles on the ground, Hoossein made for the quarter of the captives, and leaning against a heap of packages, watched for what might occur. Few, however, were the figures to be seen moving about; even the guards themselves seemed to be taking their rest, or perhaps their evening meal; for Hoossein could distinguish the hum of many voices, issuing from the cells they inhabited.

While thus occupied, and revolving many impracticable schemes for getting access without danger to some of his countrymen, the young man observed a light issue from the portal of a chamber nearly opposite. The mat which hung at the entrance of the inner

division was raised, and a female form issued forth, holding a water vessel in her hand. Hoossein's heart beat quick as he watched her pass along the raised terrace, and then descending into the court, take her way towards a cistern that supplied water, for the wants of the occupiers of the caravanserai. This was beyond his hopes, and now almost confident of finding a friend, he advanced towards her.

Engaged in drawing the water, the female did not observe that any one was approaching, until Hoossein was close at her side, while he, on his part aided by the faint light which streamed from a distant doorway, examined her person with the most earnest attention. A thrill of hope and joy shot through his heart as he gazed on her. Could it actually be so? Could his happy star have in truth brought within his reach the very one of all the captives whom he most desired to speak to? And yet how could he make himself known without creating alarm, and thus putting all to risk? But time was passing; the female turned to depart, and Hoossein no longer hesitated. "Fâtmeh! Fâtmeh! *Janum**!" whispered he, softly, in his own voice. The female started. Hoossein repeated the call.

"Allah!" exclaimed the gir aloud.

"Fâtmeh! do you not know me?" uttered he, still more distinctly.

* My soul!

“*Soobhaun-ullah!* Great God! if Hoossein Kerbelai be on the earth, that is his voice!” exclaimed she.

“Hush, hush, for Allah’s sake, dear Fât-meh,” said he. “It is I, it is Hoossein, who has come to help and try to deliver you.”

The girl, with a half suppressed shriek turned, and threw herself into his arms, exclaiming, “Ah Hoossein! Dear, dear Hoossein! where, oh, where have you been so long? Allah, Allah! what dust has fallen on our heads, Hoossein!” and she sobbed bitterly on his breast.

Soothing her as best he could, and drawing her from a spot so dangerously public, he besought her to take courage, and to make the best of the time they had, by giving all the information she could about their situation.

“And, Fât-meh, tell me for heaven’s sake, what has become of Ausieh, your own dear relative, my beloved Ausieh! is she not with you here?”

“Here, Hoossein? Ah no; Ausieh is not here; she did not come with us.”

“*Soobhân-ullah!* And what then has become of her? In the name of Allah say!”

“Alas, how can I tell? When that fierce and wicked man, Roostum Beg, destroyed our village — ah, what a night of judgment was

that, Hoossein! And you away too! Ah, had you and the rest been with us, all this mischief would never have happened, you would have guarded us all better! Well, Ausieh and I were taken together; but were almost immediately separated. We were hurried off. Ah, it was a frightful business, and many fell and were destroyed, but they put me on an ass, and I was preserved; others died. Next day, after travelling fast all night, we halted in a wild and dreary spot; not like our own sweet Yeelâks, Hoossein, but bare and rocky, and, oh! so cold! And then I saw Ausieh again. She had been brought in by another party, and she wept so much, and was so really ill, that they thought it best to keep us together, and so it was for us, Hoossein, though we cried, oh, Allah! how we cried! But we all wept together, embracing one another. And thus they carried us to Roostum Beg's fort, where we remained for some days. But after all the cruel men separated us, oh, that was the dreadful thing! The Khânum, as they called her, a coarse old woman, but not bad hearted, did what she could to comfort us, and when we were taken away she promised to be kind to Ausieh, so they brought us hither. Allah! what a journey, by your soul, we were more than half killed! But Ausieh remained behind, and what further has happened to her, in truth, I know not. But oh, Hoossein,

where have you been, and what can you do for us? Oh! for Allah's sake save us, dear Hoossein, from these villanous robbers. They say we are to be sold to the Turks, Hoossein. Can you suffer that? Oh, for God's sake—for Ausieh's sake, who loved you so well, and me her little cousin, dear, dear Hoossein save us!" and again the poor girl gave way to a passionate burst of grief.

"Oh, hush! dearest Fâtmeh, be composed, be tranquil," said he, "do not give way thus, think that, should we be overheard or seen, all would be lost; fear not, dear girl, I have friends, powerful friends, you shall not be sold, rest satisfied of that. But, Fâtmeh, we must go cautiously to work. I also am in danger; see this disguise, it is necessary to my safety as well as yours; if your guards should find us together, we are ruined."

At this moment a shrill female voice was heard calling on Fâtmeh. "Oh Heaven," said she, "that is she, I must go, God help me! Oh Hoossein do not desert us!"

"Fâtmeh! Fâtmeh! I say," exclaimed a man's voice.

"Belli Belli! coming—God bless you, Hoossein!" and giving her one caress to re-assure her, he glided from her side into the gloom, and took his way towards the gate.

He had nearly reached it, when the gleam of a lamp from the chamber of the Seraidar fell

upon a group of three persons, who were just passing through to the street, and whom Hoossein recognised as the same three persons he had observed watching him in the bazaar. His blood chilled at the thought that they might have witnessed his accidental interview with Fâtme, and overheard what had passed between them. But he shook off the thought as too painful to be entertained, and calming himself with supposing they might be lodgers in the caravanserai, going forth upon their own business, took the way homeward at once.

As he passed through the now dark and abandoned bazaar, cautiously picking his steps to avoid the holes and obstacles that too frequently occur in such thoroughfares, he again remarked that three figures passed at some distance before him, obscuring the glimmer of a solitary light, the only one to be seen in the vast length of the bazaar. The circumstance did not tend to quiet his apprehensions, and he took what precautions he could, to repel any violence that might be offered. They proved to be vain, however, for just as he reached an opening that led to a lane striking off from the bazaar, and not far from that in which was the druggist's house, he was nearly thrown from his feet by the rush of several persons together, whom he could not distinguish, and who made several blows at his person. These fortunately missed him in the dark; but in another mo-

ment his arms were seized, and, in spite of his struggling, pinioned behind him, and tied with a strip of cloth.

Finding himself thus fettered, and unable to make any further resistance, he tried to alarm the neighbourhood by shouting for help. But the bazaars, so densely crowded by day, are deserted at night, and the ruffians, resolved that his cries should prove fruitless, found means to muffle up his head so that no sound could escape. Thus was he hurried away as rapidly as the darkness would permit, until after several turnings and windings, they forced him into an open doorway, which immediately closed behind the party. Halting here for a minute until a light was brought, Hoossein saw that they were in a court surrounded by ruinous buildings; but his observations were cut short by a blow, and he was forced through a broken archway and long passage into a small quadrangular cell, where their journey terminated for the time, for they took the cloth off his head, and rudely throwing him on the ground, tied his feet with cords, keeping his hands still bound behind him. All but one then quitted the place, and Hoossein was left for a time to his own cogitations.

For a while the whirl of excitement, produced by the occurrences of the last few hours, continued so to stun and perplex his brain, that

at first he could hardly reflect at all. But as this agitation subsided, his thoughts became bitter enough. By obeying the dictates of his own impatient spirit, in spite of the warnings of his experienced friends, whom he now regarded as his true and sincere well-wishers, he had frustrated all their efforts in his favour, and lost his liberty, probably too his life; for if, as he had cause to dread, he was now in the hands of the Sheik-ul-Islam's agents, what better than death had he to expect? In addition to all this, he had ruined the hopes of those friends who had trusted to his discretion; he had sealed the fate of Ausieh, whom he would have freely poured out his blood to protect. Yet here was a solitary gleam of comfort; for he had discovered at all events that she was neither in the hands or control of the Sheikh-ul-Islam. She would not then be sacrificed to his unhallowed lust, nor sold with the rest of the captives, like beasts of the field, to Turkish Pashahs and Kiayahs. She probably was reserved for some more important purpose, and might, therefore, he hoped, be regarded as safe for a while; at all events, time would be given for his friends to interfere, and they had promised solemnly that in this point his interest should not be lost sight of.

Ausieh then would be safe; and be his own fate what it might, this was an unspeakable

relief. His malignant foe would be baffled in his unholy purpose, and vengeance, he doubted not, at one time or other, would overtake the nefarious hypocrite. Oh could his friends but learn what had occurred to him ! Could Allee Neemroo but be informed of his situation, he would not then quite despair ; and he thought of the token given him by Allee, which, with his precious ring, was still concealed amongst his rags. But how were either to be made available ? How to convey them to his friends ? Allee, though possessed of some mysterious power, was still no prophet ; and how could he hope that a deed, done in darkness, unseen by human eye, save of the perpetrators alone, should ever come to his ears ? Nay, might not any moment, the very next hour, quench every ray of hope, and close the scene by murder ?

While pondering on these gloomy thoughts, he was roused from them by the sound of approaching footsteps, and, preceded by two torchbearers, there entered a person whose aspect, though bearing the stamp of more command, was quite as unprepossessing as that of the ruffians by whom he was followed. The light, which flashed in Hoossein's eyes and blinded him for the moment, prevented him from distinguishing the features of his visitor ; yet he thought them not altogether unknown, and sought to identify them with those of some of the

servants of the Sheikh-ul Islam. But he could not satisfy himself, and little time was given him to clear up his perceptions on the subject.

"So, this is the fellow," said the man in a gruff contemptuous voice, "Mashallah! an admirable dervish! Hah ghorumsang! So you thought to throw dust in our eyes, and laugh at our beards—eh? By my own death! it was a wonderful proceeding. But you will find, lad, that we are not asses, nor is this child's play. What? Is he dumb? Has he lost his tongue since he turned dervish?"

"Wullah! I do not know," said one of the ruffians approaching him, "but we shall see." With that he seized the young man's head with brutal roughness and tried to force open his mouth. Unable to defend himself, and half frantic with indignation and despair, Hoossein caught the man's fingers between his teeth and bit them severely; on which, furious with pain, the man drew back, and disengaging himself, struck the youth a blow which threw him prostrate on the earth. Then rushing on him, he would have trampled on his person, but that the others, loudly laughing at their comrades' mishap, by the desire of their superior, drew him off.

"*Barikillah! Batchah!* well done, for a sucking dervish; spirit enough at least! Patience awhile, my sons, he will soon be at your mercy, and

then you may reckon with him for all at once."

"Cowards and beasts!" exclaimed Hoossein, excited to the utmost, "I am in your power, and ye can work your will. But beware; I tell you that each, and all of you, shall pay for my blood; ay, a maun for every miscal. Those who watch over my life have a power which ye cannot withstand. Ay, your master himself will be the first to feel it. In the mosque, or in the harem, the dagger will find him, and not a man, who takes part in my death, shall live the twelvemonth out himself."

The countenance of the youth, glowing as it did with the fervor of indignation, had something so impressive, and even awful, as to stagger the minds of his persecutors, who, superstitious as they were ignorant and insolent, entertained a feeling of awe for even the appearance of a dervish, and regarded all violence offered to such persons, as a more dangerous and unpardonable sacrilege, than any breach of the written law, or even of their professed faith. One of them, in particular, drew back in manifest dismay at what he probably conceived to be the prophetic threats of an inspired enthusiast. He even spoke apart to the superior, and Hoossein observed that immediately afterwards he left the place.

Observing the impression he had pro-

duced, the young man endeavoured to increase it, by assuming more of the tone and mystic language of the dervish.

“Ye call me boy, and throw contempt upon my youth; but again I say, beware, for the youth of the servants of the Most High is more honourable than the age of the wicked, and Allah will avenge their blood. Would ye dare to lay hands upon a servant of the Omnipotent? To extinguish a beam of the essence of the Almighty?—fools! It would become a brand to consume ye ere it sought reunion with its eternal service.”

But the effect was less successful than that of his first indignant burst, for the leaders, rather irritated than awed by his harangue, exclaimed,

“Silence, vain babbler! Silence! or we may speedily try to quench this beam. We are no fools to be duped by a *fuzool*.”

“To the devil with the ghorumsang!” growled one of the ruffians. “Who is he that we should stand here and let the unclean beast do his pleasure with our fathers’ graves? I say, Bismillah Aga! Allee Asker is away; so give me but the word, and this longhee—” so saying, he unwound the girdle from his waist, and seizing Hoosseïn by the neck, attempted to bind it round his throat, in spite of the impotent struggles of the wretched prisoner.

The chief of the band stood glaring on his victim, yet irresolute, as if he ventured not on such extremities ; and while Hoossein thus lay, as it were, under the very knife of the executioner, the man who had gone out returned, and whispered a few words into the leader's ear.

"Well," replied he, grumbling, "if so it is to be, it must be, I suppose."

And, at the unwilling signal which he gave, the man retreated from his prisoner who saw himself, for the moment, at least, delivered from the pains of death. Again was Hoossein left still bound as before, and more than an hour passed without further interruption. At the end of that time three of the men, who had been concerned in his capture, made their appearance accoutred for a journey. Unloosing Hoossein's legs, they made him stand upright, which he could only do with difficulty, and stripping from him the skin he wore, and dragging the false hair from his head, but leaving him his vest of rags, which was not worth their taking, they threw over him an old Abba, and put a felt cap upon his head ; then relaxing the ligatures of his arms, they placed before him some bread and a few crumbs of cheese.

A suspicion crossed the young man's mind. Could they mean to destroy him by poison ? If

so, why should they change his dress, when a few hours would give to their disposal all he possessed? Why was the attempt so lately made to strangle him put a stop to? Nevertheless, by way of precaution, he would partake only of the bread that was offered, as a substance not likely to be adulterated, and therefore safe; and this and a draught of water being despatched, they told him to rise and follow them, taking care to prevent any attempt at escape, by holding fast the strip of cloth which had once more been drawn close round his elbows. In this way was he led back to the ruinous court, where, by the light of a burning torch, he saw three horses caparisoned and ready for mounting, held by a servant. A handkerchief being tied round his mouth, to prevent his giving the alarm, he was lifted on the croup of one of them, a man mounting before. The rest well armed and fully prepared, sprung to their horses, and in another moment they were threading the streets of the city, in the gloom of a moonless morning.

Day broke upon the party, as without halting, they passed the caravanserai at Bessittoon, and leaving Saheneh on their right hand, pushed on towards Kengaver, by a cross path, through the mountains. The way was intricate and lonely; the country inhabited only by Eeliauts, and they rose among pastoral hills,

which in summer are covered with rich herbage, but were now brown and barren, and capped with snow. A long toilsome march of more than forty miles brought the party to a small and sheltered hollow, where, like a black spot in the desert, was seen a mass of ruins that marked the position of a spring and a little rill. It was said to be the remains of a hunting seat of one of the ancient monarchs of Iraun; but all that now remained were the fragments of several arches, and one large apartment, the groined roof of which was blackened by the smoke of a thousand fires. Here they dismounted to rest their weary beasts, and refresh themselves with food and sleep, and Hoossein was dragged roughly enough from his uneasy seat, so stiff and sore, that on putting his foot to the ground he could hardly stand. He was not even allowed the refreshment of sitting quietly in the pleasant evening sun, as its declining rays slanted along the valley even to the spot where they had halted; but he was forced into the dark and dreary vault, and secured by the legs to a mass of masonry that had fallen from the roof, and at the foot of which he stretched himself out to take what rest he might be able to obtain.

In the meantime, his guards having attended to their horses, took to preparing food for themselves. A fire was kindled of weeds and bushes,

and was fed with the dry dung of animals, of which plenty was found in the place; and one of the men having produced from his *cooryeens* (or saddle-bags) a piece of meat, it was broiled upon the embers, to relish the bread and lumps of cold-boiled rice, which each drew from his bags, or *Shulwár* pockets.

While they were thus occupied, steps were heard approaching, and the voice of an old man soon succeeded, who, entering with the salute of peace, besought those who had possession of the place, to admit him to the shelter of a corner, and if possible, for Allah's sake, to a morsel of food. He had missed his way, he said, among the hills, and had wandered about since morning, so that he was faint with fatigue and want.

The men gruffly demanded, whence he came, and whither he was bound? He was an Eeliaut, he replied, a Karagooslee, but from a distant part. His son had gone to live at a village, near Saheneh, and had died there; and he was going to learn what had become of any effects he might have possessed. A close survey of his person ensued; but the examination produced no discovery. He wore a peasant's dress, very ragged, with the common Eeliaut felt cap and jacket; but his look was aged, and his step was feeble; so permission to enter was accorded him, and by degrees he crept

into the fire-side, to warm his half-numbed limbs.

In the meantime, the meal proceeded, and a few morsels were thrown to Hoosseïn, whose arms were loosed as before, while he ate. Fatigued and downcast as he was, he had not neglected to make his observations; not that he distinctly expected any occurrence to his advantage; but that he felt, if there was a hope for him, it must rest on his situation being made known to his friends, by means of some intermediate person. All that day he had looked in vain for travellers; not a human being had they met in their long march: and now, from the old and miserable wayfarer, who had stumbled on their solitary munzil, what was there to be expected?

Still, hope being the sweetest food of the wretched, Hoosseïn would not throw it from him; and though, certainly, the first appearance of the stranger was unpromising, there was somewhat in his manner, which, after a while, fixed the young man's eye, and stimulated him to minuter observation. He saw, that though the stranger bore many marks of decrepitude, a dark and glittering eye glanced keenly and curiously round from under a shaggy brow and tattered cap; and that though he bore the Eeliaut garb, there were moments when the wearer betrayed a shade of the pecu-

liarly reckless indifference of manner, that stamps the fraternity of dervishes.

It might, indeed, be the creature of his brain, the offspring of his wishes, rather than a reality; but the notion having once gained a place in his imagination, he resolved to make trial of the signal he had received from Allee. It could produce no harm should it even fail of doing good; and, accordingly, after devouring the scraps of food which were offered him, he commenced, as if urged by pain or distress of mind, to utter sundry ejaculations, as "*Ai Khodae! Subhan-ullah! Rebbee!*" from which insulated words he advanced gradually more into the regions of Sooffeeism, breaking forth with a "*Che mi danum!*" and a distich from Hafiz, or the Musnavi, which he had picked up from his guide, Noor Shah. This sally elicited from his guards a command: "Be silent, thou dog of a dervish."

"A dervish, truly!" returned he; "for of penance and fasting there is no lack; yet, would ye deny me the liberty of prayer! Allah, Allah! how I thirst! The fountain is near me, yet I cannot reach it; give me, O man, the desire of my heart! *Behak-e-Allee*, give me water. *Behak-e-Koodrut-ul-Kudeer!* help me to drink."

While Hoossein was yet speaking, the stranger took hold of the water vessel, and was

carrying it to his head, but, on hearing these ejaculations, he turned to the guards, who were now seated at their ease round the fire, and smoking their nargilleh.

“That wretch wants this more than I do,” said he. “Whatever be his sins, he is a creature of Allah; by your permission, I will give him the water.”

With these words, he rose; and approaching Hoossein, he held the water vessel to his head, saying—

“*Bismillah*, man, drink! drink, and remember the blessed Hoossein in your prayers; and Allee, the powerful and the open handed, will not forget you in your trouble!”

And while he thus spoke, he took an opportunity of laying his hand upon Hoossein’s arm, which he griped with force. The touch thrilled to the very heart of the youth. It was like the infusion of new life into his veins. His signal had been understood, and answered; his condition was known. It would be reported to his friends, and, *Inshallah!* his life would be saved; nay, his freedom insured. What a change in his feelings, from those of a short moment before! All, then, was doubt, despondency; all, now, was hope, and almost joy. He was satisfied; his groans ceased; he laid himself calmly down, and, seeking no further intercourse with the mysterious stranger,

courted the repose which he so much required.

It was near daybreak on the morrow, before Hoossein was summoned to pursue his journey, which was done much in the same order as on the preceding day; but Hoossein had now a source of comfort within him, which supported him through the long-fatiguing march; and though his body might suffer, his heart was light and buoyant. The Eeliaut stranger was not seen in the morning; he had been yet earlier than they, and Hoossein wondered not at his departure, which appeared to have excited no suspicion in his guards. Pressing onwards still, by the least frequented paths, they avoided Kengaver; and leaving Seyedabad at a little distance, ascended the weary pass which crosses the shoulder of Elwund, and drew up, heartily fatigued, at a little village, near its foot, on the other side.

It appeared to be their purpose to avoid entering Hamadân by daylight; for they halted only till evening fall; when, mounting again, they pushed on, and reached that city about midnight. Treading the dark streets, they stopped at length at a doorway, in a lofty mud wall, which was not opened till after the lapse of a considerable space of time; and then Hoossein being dragged from horseback, was led through more than one court and passage

to a cell, into which he was thrust neck and heels, his arms still bound, though less tightly, behind his back, and left without light or comfort of any sort, to pass the night as best he might.

The buoyancy of spirit, which had ushered in the morning, and supported the young man during this fatiguing day's journey, was pretty well exhausted before its close, and now gave way to a fresh fit of despondency at this dreary termination to his unlucky adventure. Perhaps, though he scarcely admitted it to himself he did entertain the hope of some effort in his favour on the part of his friends ; and the disappointment was imbibited by the conviction, which hourly increased in his mind, that the treatment he suffered betokened the malice of an enemy resolved upon his ruin, and that however active his friends might be, he should probably become the victim, before they could discover where he was, or interfere in his behalf. That he was in the hands of the Sheikh-ul-Islam he felt convinced ; and though he did not forget the power, which his friend Allee Neemroo declared himself to possess over that priest, he could not but feel how uncertain it was, that Allee might learn his danger, in time to arrive to his rescue.

The very morning about to dawn might be his last ; for if death were his destined portion,

what cause could his enemy have, for delaying to strike? Life was far from indifferent to Hoossein, and the greater and nearer his danger became, the more powerful did he feel the ties that bound him to the world; the thought of being thus iniquitously torn from all the objects of his affection, to gratify the capricious tyranny of a wicked priest, was inexpressibly bitter. But alas! what could he do? A prisoner in bonds, he was powerless. Nothing was left him, but passive dignified submission. He resolved to man his heart against his fate, to deny his enemies the satisfaction of extorting from him either word or groan. Indignation gave him strength to form his resolve; while occupied in these reflections, nature overpowered by toil gave way, and he sunk to sleep upon the cold floor of his prison.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

THE rising sun flung its bright beams into a fair apartment, through windows formed of coloured glass, disposed in pleasing figures, the under portions of which were thrown open to admit the fresh air. The floor was covered with carpets of velvet texture, and brilliant dyes, the fabric of Herât looms; and along the sides were stretched the thick soft numuds of Tuft, or Khaeen in Khorasan, forming luxurious seats for the accommodation of guests. But at the upper end, near the window lay a less gorgeous, but still thicker and softer felt, more particularly appropriated to the use of the master of the mansion.

The walls of this apartment, to a height of three feet from the floor, were painted in patterns of crimson, and white, and green, and gold, representing flowers, upon a ground of azure; and in the niches and recesses, which were similarly adorned, stood handsome china vases, mingled with large bottles of rose water,

and various other articles of luxury and ornament; while quinces and oranges ranged on several of the ledges, diffused their rich odour through the room.

At one side in a large recess, was a fire place, in which, for the mornings were now chill, blazed a bright fire of wood, and beside this fire place, upon a beautiful cushion, in an attitude of thoughtful abstraction, sat the owner of this luxurious *khelwut*.

He was a man of more than ordinary stature and portly presence, whose fresh colour, keen black eye, marked features, and haughty resolute expression, bespoke a mind, prepared to execute its purposes at all hazards, and at any cost; while a malignant scowl, which shot over the countenance with a frequency that marked it as an habitual visitant of the severe features, gave token of the many sinister thoughts that resided in the owner's breast. It was in short, the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân, who was engaged at his morning devotions, while a confidential attendant, who stood near the door, seemed to be making a report to his holiness.

The sleeves of the priest were loosened, and turned up above the elbows, and the fine, though sober coloured cashmere shawl, which formed his girdle, had, from the ostentation of strict religious scruple, been laid aside, be-

cause it contained some threads of silk embroidery. He sat in a contemplative attitude, his body stooping rather forward, while the head was inclined the contrary way, so that the face was upturned, and the dark gleam of his eye shot from beneath the knitted brow with any anything but a placid expression. The attendant stood still, silent, with one hand resting on the hilt of his dagger, watching the words and movements of his haughty master, but replying only when spoken to, and that in a tone of profound respect.

"Taken—caught at last," muttered the priest. "The worm is now in my power. When was he brought hither?"

"A short time after midnight, my lord."

"And they have placed him—?"

"In the cell of furnace-burned bricks, beside the *hummaum*, my lord. His arms are still tied, and even were he unbound, escape is impossible."

"Good! There let him lie; but after all, why did Shere Allee, and Mustapha plague themselves and me, by bringing the prisoner hither at all? Could they not have saved themselves the trouble?"

"My lord, it is said, that Aga Jeewah forbade it; that he thought from certain expressions that dropped from the young man, it might be well if you examined him yourself before—"

“Aga Jeewah is an old ass. I believed Shere Allee had better stuff in him, than to listen to such fancies, whatever the Aga might do.”

“My lord, your servant would state, that as he understood the matter, the words of the youth imply danger to the august life of the Huzoor, and *that* was his reason for wishing that you might inquire and judge for yourself, before it should be too late to do so.”

“*My* life!—The worm! The contemptible atom! What could my life have to do with him? Aga Jeewah must be raving mad!”

“My lord, I know not that; but the men themselves are here. Would it please you to see them, and hear what they have to represent?”

The Sheikh pondered for a while; but at length, as if awaking from another fit of contemplation, he replied, “It is well. Admit Shee Allee.”

This man, who appeared to be the principal of those who were concerned in the abduction of Hoossein, was now introduced; and after a profound obeisance, stood silent, with arms crossed, awaiting to be questioned.

“So—thou hast brought us a prisoner instead of a head. How has this happened? We deemed you knew your duty better.”

“My lord, let it be stated for your service, that the blame rests not with your servant.

The commands of Aga Jeewah were more powerful than his—”

“Ah—we have heard that you plead to have acted by the Aga’s orders. Have you no letter? No message on the subject from him?”

“My lord, it was Allee Asker who saw the Aga upon that occasion. Ismael Jeloudar would have made short work of the business; and I was as ready as he, but Allee Asker brought the Aga’s directions, and I had barely time to prepare for our journey with the prisoner.”

“Where, and how was he taken?”

“My lord, Hussun and I had been for some days looking after the Ameenabâdee captives, most of whom were kept in the Koordish caravanserai, and remarking that certain dervishes visited it frequently, and knowing what devils for mischief they are, we watched them closely, and discovered that one in particular was seldom long away from the place. Late one evening we observed him in the bazaar, and supposing he would go as usual to the caravanserai, we followed him. In the end we traced him thither, and soon observed him in conversation with a female, who came from the captives’ quarters. From their conversation, which we found means to overhear, we discovered who this dervish was, and, on their separating,

followed and seized him in spite of his resistance. Such is our true statement."

"And the female?"

"My lord, of her we only know that he called her Fâtmeh, and that she appeared to be young."

"Why did he not seize her also?"

"Impossible! my lord; the caravanseraï would have been alarmed, and we should have lost the more important prisoner. The Buchtiarees were on the watch: it was the darkness that favoured both him and ourselves, or we never could have effected what we did."

"Enough; depart, and send Allee Asker hither."

The man made his obeisance and withdrew; and after a delay of some time, which the Sheikh-ul-Islam employed in alternate fits of abstraction and impatience, the man was introduced. He was a more composed and less ferocious ruffian than the other, and had less of mean servility in his demeanour, as he made the usual salutation to his master.

"You have come when you were not expected," said the priest after a while; "we scarce can give you the welcome. But let us understand, it has not yet reached our comprehension, why Aga Jeewah sent thee hither."

"Let it be stated in your service, my lord, that the Aga held it expedient, that you should

yourself examine this youth before proceeding to extremities. The words which your servant heard from his own mouth were such, as taken in conjunction with other circumstances, might well inspire Aga Jeewah with apprehension."

"What were these words?"

"When the lad believed his hour was come, when the executioners were standing ready to deal with him, he defied them all; declaring himself to be under the protection of a power which even yourself, my lord, were unable to withstand, and that his blood would be demanded, 'a maun for each misal,' from you, and every one concerned in his death."

"Barikillah! beast and coward! And is it this threat, the aimless words of a despairing wretch, that have turned the brain of Aga Jeewah upside down, and shook the resolution of Allee Asker and Sheer Allee?" demanded the priest with a wrathful sneer. "Wonderful servants I have truly, to start thus at their own shadow on the wall!"

"Let your servant be pardoned, my lord. The words of the wretch under the sticks, or of one with the knife at his throat, are seldom found untrue; and, be it remembered by the Huzoor, that this youth, who was taken in the dress of a dervish, had been all along consorting with dervishes who at the time were in far greater number than usual at Kermanshah, while

there were some of great influence and celebrity. The belief of Aga Jeewah, as also of your servant was, and continues to be, that his appearance in that place at this particular time, indicates some especial connexion between them, and that theirs is the power by which he is protected."

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, my lord need not be reminded of the remarkable power possessed by these dervishes, especially to do evil. They strike secretly, but not the less certainly. Let the Huzoor recall to mind the dreadful power of the Ishmaelees; and what were the *Bâtunniah* but Soofees, Dervishes? But pardon your servant, what is he to speak before my lord? If he has erred, he is in your hands, and must abide your pleasure."

The Sheikh-ul-Islam was evidently moved by his servant's observations, in spite of his efforts to treat them with contempt. But speedily rallying, and assuming an expression of withering scorn, he said, "So this is the bug-bear! the Dervishes! the Soofees! and you would have me fear their daggers and their poison, hah? Admirable, indeed; I, the Sheikh-ul-Islam of this place, all powerful at court, surrounded with bold and faithful servants, yourself among the number, mashallah! am I to live the life of a fox or a hare, in constant dread of the malice of a rabble of mendicants,

because I remove a peasant from my path ; or, if I would eat my bread in security and peace, must comply with their terms, forsooth, and spare him ! By the sainted head of Allee, and the holy Kaaba, they shall find their error. My own counsel shall guide me, my own will alone shall control me ; and if insects will dare to walk in my path, they shall be brushed from it, as the dust is blown by the wind ! What is the use of my servants, my guards, hah ?”

“ My lord, the dagger that was plunged in the earth beside Sultaun Sanjar’s pillow, could not, as it appeared, be kept out by guards or faithful servants ; nor did the power or the splendours of the Khalifat save Ul-Mooster-shed, or Ul-Rasheed Billah, from the Bâtun-niah knife.”

The priest cast a searching glance at his servant ; a glance, in which surprise was mingled with suspicion, as he muttered,

“ Ay, treachery, indeed, may penetrate the anderoon and the khelwut, but let the traitors beware ; they will find neither an Abbasside ass, nor a Seljookian dupe in the person of Meerza Jemal-u-deen. And let Aga Jeewah or Allee Asker start at shadows as they may, and let dervishes or Soofees threaten as they will, the man, or woman either, who once crosses our path, shall never do it more.”

“My lord, let your servant represent, let him entreat you to see this young man, to pause at least upon his doom. Think that the deed once done is irrevocable, life once taken cannot be restored.”

“Away, fool! you are dismissed, begone! Had you obeyed my orders you would have spared your master the knowledge and the danger of the deed, if danger there should be. Away! In future I must choose more resolute instruments.”

“My lord, think in the name of Allah.”

“Hence, man, away! what? Must I believe thee traitor? Begone!”

“Traitor? but it is well, no doubt I merit the term. The day may come, however, my lord, when you will regret that you listened to the voice of your own passions rather than to the honest warning of your servant Allee Asker.”

With these words the man withdrew, and the Sheikh remained for some time absorbed in thoughts which seemed to be of no comfortable nature. The morning was advancing, yet the Sheikh had not risen to pursue his usual occupations, and the attendant more than once lifted up the silken curtain to see whether his master might require his services, yet still did he continue in the same attitude of deep reflection. At length he summoned him to appear.

"Let Sheer Allee be sent hither," said he, and the man having presented himself, the Sheikh looked at him hard; but, for a time, the words he would have uttered seemed cleaving to his jaws, for he could not, or at least did not speak. At length, as by an effort, he addressed him. "Your prisoner; he is secure?"

"Assuredly, my lord."

"What is he now doing?"

"The last time we looked into the cell, he was sleeping soundly."

"Sleeping? It were well then that he should not wake. Listen: the man has been needlessly brought hither to embarrass us. Let him no longer remain a nuisance in our way. A peasant, who has slain your comrades! Begone! I give you his blood."

"Be cheshm!" exclaimed Sheer Allee, and with a bow, he withdrew.

Had a superficial observer, at that time, remarked the countenance of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, he might not have detected any symptom of powerful emotion in those stubborn features; yet his breast, nevertheless, was the seat of an agitation which he could neither control nor comprehend, and for which, he did, in fact, despise himself.

The life of a man! What was it? A toy, a bubble, which he had not the least compunction at breaking or dissipating, as he had done

with such airy nothings, times without number
An enemy, too; one who had crossed his path,
and earned his implacable hatred by resisting
him in a favourite pursuit! Hatred was
not the least active of the elements that boiled
in his bosom, ready to be discharged in a lava-
flood of fury upon its object. And yet, whence
it came, he knew not; but there was an inward
scruple, an instinctive reluctance, which op-
posed the dictates of that wrath, and produced
an involuntary hesitation in pronouncing the
doom of his victim.

While musing on this inconsistency of his
spirit, he was roused from the mood, into
which he had fallen, by the noise of a bustle
without; and after a moment the attendant
entered, and whispered some words in the ear
of his master, who, awaking from his gloomy
reverie, exclaimed,

“How? Allee? from whence, and for what?
what is his business?”

“That, my lord, he declines to say, but states
it to be urgent, and craves immediate ad-
mittance.”

“Urgent business?” muttered the Sheikh,
“and at this time? But it matters not; admit
him.” And in another minute the purdeh rose,
and gave entrance to a figure, who, clad in
coarse and travel-stained garments, after the
usual salutation, advanced calmly towards the

master of the house. It was Allee Neemroo, who, in spite of the traces of haste and exertion that appeared on his outward man, maintained the quiet unruffled demeanour which so strongly characterized him.

The Sheikh, tendering the salutation of peace and welcome, desired he would be seated, and, in compliance with an expressive gesture from Allee, told the attendant to leave the apartment.

When they were alone, the horse-dealer rose, and reseating himself close in front of the priest, fixed his one expressive eye upon the hard countenance of the other, who, ill at ease already, did not very patiently endure its searching glance.

“It is well, Allee,” said he; “in the name of God, say on; what has brought thee hither? What is thy business, and the cause of thy strange behaviour?”

“Then, in the name of God, I will tell you,” returned the other with solemnity. “I have come from afar, Mehdee. Nay, frown not at a familiarity which I seldom assume, though now it suits the plainness of my purpose. I have come from afar, and in haste, to save more lives than one; thy own among the number; and I give thanks to Allah that I come not too late.”

“*My* life! To save *my* life!” said the Sheikh, with proud scorn; “and how comes

that to be in Allee's hands, to save or to destroy?"

"That such is the case will in good time become apparent, and the how and the when shall then also be made known to thee. In the meantime, listen to me. Thou hast taken guilefully, by means of thy servants, in the bazaar of Kermanshah, a youth, the native of a village once 'the abode of peace,' now ruined; how, thyself perchance mayest know. I demand his life and person."

"Thy assurance is equal to thy familiarity, it seems; and both, Mashallah! are wonderful, when they are pushed to such a length," replied the priest, disguising under a haughty austerity of manner the uneasiness which in truth he felt. "It might be sufficient were I to deny all knowledge of such a youth, and what then couldst thou have to reply? But I scorn the falsehood, and avow the fact. He is here, Allee; for his body by this time probably lies deep in the vaults of my humamum: he will find associates there."

"Thou mayest thank thy fortune, Mehdee," replied Allee, with unmoved calmness, "that such is not the case; for, were it so, thy own doom were sealed. No; happily I reached this place in time to arrest the mandate of death, and the youth still exists. Confirm my act; command that no hand be laid upon him; and then listen to my words."

“Ay,” said the Sheikh, with darkening brow and threatening accent; “has thy audacity, then, reached so high a pitch as to interfere with my commands in my own house? By Allah! this must be looked to!”

“Be patient, and listen,” said Allee, in a voice and with a gesture of high authority, arresting the signal which the priest was about to make for his servants. “Thou knowest something of me, Mehdee; or, if thou better likest the title, Sheikh-ul-Islam; thou knowest that whatever aspect I may wear to the world, my word is sacred; that in matters of moment I never speak or threaten in vain. Now, I swear to thee by thine own head, and by the might of the Most High, that on the life of that youth depends thine own; that, so sure as his blood is shed, it shall be paid by thine. I came to prevent this double catastrophe, and now once more conjure thee, as thou regardest thine own life, to refrain from attempting that of Hoosseïn of Ameenabâd.”

“And I now tell thee, Allee, that were the sword which strikes his neck to cut at the same moment the thread of my life, I would still command it to fall. But I scoff at thy assertions, and despise thy threats. The boy hath dared to thwart my will; a worm hath raised its head to sting me, and shall I not crush it? By the holy Kaaba, he dies, were it but for the

satisfaction of learning how his death is to affect my life !”

“ Then, by the still holier power that sanctified that holy Kaaba, he shall *not* die ; and I, that Allee, whom thou knowest, have sworn it. Nay, rise not ; storm not, Mehdee ; it is useless. Bethink thee rather of the days that are past. Remember what thou hast been, and who I am. By the memory of these days, be they bitter or sweet to thee, I conjure thee deny not the request I now make ; for thy own sake, if not for mine. By thine own soul, I seek no quarrel with thee. What profit were that to me ? Be wise, be reasonable, and let such terms be kept between us as may yet subsist. I seek not thy destruction.”

“ Thou dost not ? Mashallah ! thou art kind ! Art thou mad, Allee ? Is thy brain dried up, that thou pratest thus ? Why, what is there to hinder my crushing thee, as well as the insolent dog for whom thou hast so wildly pleaded ?”

“ I will tell thee, Mehdee. If the recollection of those early days were insufficient to check such unprincipled treachery, know that not even in this thy house can thy power or thy commands affect my life. Thinkest thou that *I* would put myself in *thy* power ? Hast thou seen ‘ ass ’ so deeply written in this mutilated visage as to imagine me capable of such

weakness? Be undeceived. Thy power affects not me; it rests on hollow grounds. The fellowship of the wicked is but a rope of sand; the closed hand gathereth not, and the power based on fear endureth not long. This miserable person and deformed countenance exercise more real power than the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân, with all his influence and retainers, gholauts, moollahs, and eunuchs, in his own city. Listen, Mehdee; thou art a bold ambitious man; thou hast played an able game, and risen high in the favour of a weak monarch and priest-ridden court. Thy name for sanctity is high, and thou art revered by many who know thee not. But that *I* know thee, thou art well aware. Thou knowest, that I could blast that reputation; that I could brand thee as—I need not tell you what. Nor does this power rest with me alone. The sword which threatens me is grasped by many hands; and were aught to befall me, there are those remaining who would not fail to revenge me. The power *I* wield thou canst neither reach nor avoid. It pervades the air thou breathest, and penetrates the khelwut, the harem, and the mosque. It is not put in motion on slight occasions, but never fails of its purpose. Shouldst thou doubt my word, and ask for proofs, I would ask thee how it came, that, at twenty fursucks' distance, I knew

of this youth's jeopardy? By what means have I traced every step of his progress, from the threshold of his own desolate home to his incarceration in thy prisons? How did I learn thy own plans and designs, and contrive to be upon the spot to frustrate them?"

"Allah-il-ullah! thou art a prophet surely," responded the Sheikh, with a hollow and scornful laugh, under which it was not difficult to detect uneasiness; "or art thou perchance the blessed Mehdee, my holy namesake, praise be to Allah! who himself has thrown off his veil of concealment, to appear in the august form of Allee Neemroo, and give counsel to his unworthy namesake in his hour of need? By my own death, our holy prophet himself, to whose name be praise! could scarcely have come out with a more awful denunciation than thou hast uttered! But knowest thou, O wonderful man, the misdeeds of this youth, whom thou art so resolute to save from punishment? Art thou aware that he and his brethren are rebels against the Shah's authority, and have put to death the Shah's messengers, that they are condemned by the royal *ruckum*?"

"I know, that provoked by excessive extortion and atrocious insult, these villagers rose in self-defence, and punished their insolent oppressors. I know too, that on the matter being rightly represented to the Shah, his Ma-

jesty granted to the whole of them a full and free pardon. I know moreover, that a doom not less sweeping and terrible than would have been produced by the effects of the royal anger did soon overtake the ill-starred village; and now I find that *thou* hast set thyself to work to complete the sacrifice of the miserable remains of the survivors."

"Thou knowest much, Allee; but not, it seems, everything, in spite of thy boasted power. It is true, indeed, as thou hast said, that his majesty the Shah, blinded by false representations, and deceived by the specious words of the Wâli of Louristan, did grant a pardon to those rebels of Ameenabâd; but it is not less certain that on further and more authentic representations being laid at the foot of the throne, his majesty indignantly reversed his first decree, and issued forth an order to punish the murderous rebels, and especially to cause destruction to alight upon the youth, who not only bore so conspicuous a part in committing the crime, but who had imposed so grossly on the royal ear."

"Ay, Mehdee, and is it so? Then, by the truth of Allee, I can guess to whom this change of favour is owing; but it shall change again, be sure. So beware thou of acting on the order as thou sayest it now stands."

"Thou doubtest the existence of such an order, then? Thine eyes shall see it, man; so

shalt thou be convinced that things may occur, which thy prophetic spirit cannot reach. Ho, *Batchah* ! hither."

The attendant came, and, at his master's order, brought before him an ornamented brass bound box, which being opened by a key appended to his bunch of private signets, the priest took from it a small bundle of papers, and, selecting two of a peculiar form and texture, he showed them to Allee.

The latter, glancing at them, and observing the royal signet, mused for awhile as one in doubt.

"Ah, miserable weakness !" muttered he, inaudibly. "A broken reed art thou, indeed, to depend on, and blackened shall be the face of him who trusts to thee !"

He then replied aloud as follows :—

"I am not, as thou knowest, Mehdee, much of a Meerza, nor do I pretend to much experience in documents from the Dewankhaneh ; but this I will say, that, however obtained, these *Ruckums* betray a manifest inconsistency with each other. The King has been tampered with by fraud, and shall be undeceived. I again demand the person of Hoosseïn of Ameenabâd to be placed in my hands."

"And I tell thee, Allee, it cannot be ; this ruckum which I hold must be obeyed."

"And thinkest thou still to put this youth to death ?"

“ I mean to do so. Duty to my sovereign, as well as justice to the dead, demand his blood.”

“ Then, again, I tell thee that it shall not be; were it at the sacrifice of my own life, as well as thine, he *shall* be saved.”

“ And I tell thee that I defy thy power, ridicule thy threats, and that he shall *die*.”

“ Darest thou defy me, Mehdee? Beware! Bethink thou yet, and pause. Rememberest thou that dreadful night? Rememberest thou that scene, and the catastrophe it led to? I swear to thee, that if thou dost persist in this foul purpose, I will unmask thee. The Shah, the whole court, the people both here and at the capital, shall know the man who has cheated them out of their reverence and high regard. Ruin will overwhelm thee. Thy very coadjutors at the Durkhaneh and in the mosque, corrupt, rapacious, and bigoted, as they are, must, in self-defence, abandon thee, and be the first to spurn thee; for their own sakes, they will.”

“ And art thou, then, so weak, as to suppose *me* in thy power? Who is there that will believe thee, Allee? Is the word of an obscure horse-dealer to weigh against *my* sacred character? Phah! Thou art a fool, man! I pity thee!”

“ Is that thy security? Trust not to it,

Mehdee! Weak indeed thou must esteem me, and worthy of thy contempt had I trusted in such a matter to the influence of my own poor word. But deceive not thyself. I have other proof, proof not to be resisted either by thee or others; and, to end this warfare, hark in thine ear —— ”

And Allee, bending forwards, whispered a few words into the ear of the Sheikh.

Whatever the import, the effect of these whispered words was decided and instantaneous. Not even the strong nerves of the Sheikh-ul-Islam could resist the powerful emotion they occasioned. The colour fled from his dark and usually ruddy cheek, and gave place to a deadly hue. The closely-compressed lips appeared struggling with a groan, and his whole frame quivered with alarm. He cast a hasty glance around as if to seek for the means of escaping, or more probably of ridding himself violently of his unwelcome visitor; but he saw that the eye of Allee followed every movement with an eagle's gaze. He felt that he was baffled, and the conviction of this fact cowed him still more; and thus, glaring on each other, did these two singular men remain for several minutes watching every movement, as two tigers about to spring, or as practised wrestlers seeking for an unguarded point in which to seize their adversaries.

The Sheikh was the first to speak. Knowing the man with whom he had to deal, and seeing that neither force nor treachery was likely to avail him anything, he said, "It is enough; have it thine own way: to-day is thine, to-morrow may be mine. But dost thou then mean to resist the will of the Shah, as well as the purpose of thy former companion? Wilt thou commit so pointed an act of rebellion?"

Allee paused for a moment. "I am neither a rebel, nor a countenancer of rebellion," replied he. "All I desire, is to secure the lad's life. Let him be sent to Ispahan; let the Shah himself decide upon his fate."

"It is well," replied the Sheikh; "now thou art reasonable, and we may come to terms. Learn that I am, myself, about to proceed to the court; and instead of having sentence executed here upon the lad, he shall accompany me thither. Thou mayest then act as thou wilt, and use in his favour, what influence thou canst. Will this content thee?"

"It will, Mehdee, provided thou keepest faith; and rest assured the smallest act of treachery attempted, will take effect more on thyself, than on him thou wouldst destroy."

A smile of double, and diabolical meaning,

crossed the Sheikh's features, at these words; but he made no reply. Whether Allee remarked it or not was uncertain, but he rose and said, "It is well, Sheikh-ul-Islam; and now be pleased to countermand the orders of death, which thou didst give. See that thy prisoner rest in safety beneath thy roof; and Allah grant thee the same measures of security and peace, which thou dealest to others."

"*Be cheshm!* on my eyes be it!" replied the Sheikh. "Rely upon my word, and so rest thee satisfied."

Allee Neemroo, having left the room, the Sheikh-ul-Islam continued gazing at the doorway, by which he departed, with a countenance ominously dark.

"Ay, go thy ways, dog!" he muttered through his clenched teeth; "Bitterly shalt thou rue this day! Threatened, defied! insulted in my own house!—yet powerless to blast the insolent insulter! The curse of hell wither him!—but let it be. Women curse—men kill! The unblest villain—know I not well the power he wields?—Have *I* not sought to wield it also; and failing of success, have I not sought to destroy it? Now foiled in both attempts, the weapon falls upon my own head. Then let it fall; they will find me no easy prey, and Inshallah! more than I, may perish by the blow."

Long did the musings of the priest continue, and bursts of rage from time to time betrayed the fierce agitation of his soul ; but at length, he summoned his attendant, and issuing certain orders to him, rose to pursue his ordinary occupations.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

THE deep sleep, into which Hoosseïn had fallen, was broken at length by the noise of the opening of a door. A wandering sunbeam, which found its way into his cheerless cell, informed him that morning was already advanced; and after rousing his faculties, and collecting his senses, which had been somewhat stupified by his profound repose, he looked up to discover what had caused the noise which awoke him. From a corner of his cell, he saw the figure of a man cautiously approaching; and bound and helpless, as he was, he started up, impressed with the belief, that his hour had come, and that this was his executioner. Nor was this belief removed by discovering, in the person of his visitant, one of the guards, whom he had seen at Kermanshah, and who has been mentioned by the name of Allee Askêr.

Yet the manner of the man did not seem to prognosticate violence; and Hoosseïn's sur-

prise was not greater than his satisfaction, when his supposed murderer, first making a signal for silence, produced from a napkin a quantity of victuals, and whispered, "Eat of these with confidence, and drink freely of the water in this vessel; but taste not what is brought to you by other hands, until you see me again; do this and fear nothing; and stay, though I dare not remove your bonds, I will loosen them, so that you may have greater liberty. Be discreet, and God protect you."

With these words, he glided from the cell, leaving Hoossein divided between hope and doubt; for though desirous to trust in what sounded like the voice of a friend, he could by no means account for the sudden transmutation of a former enemy into a protector.

With regard to the victuals, however, hunger soon decided the question. There was no living without food, and little difference between death by poison or by hunger. Yet Hoossein yielded less to the cravings of nature than to his own sanguine disposition, which whispered him that he might trust the words of his new friend. With difficulty, for his bonds still restrained him, he contrived to satisfy his appetite, and to conceal in a dark corner, the remains of the food that had been furnished him; and scarcely had an hour elapsed after so doing, when the door of his

prison again opened, and his other guard made his appearance with a basket, from which he took food and water.

“Here, comrade,” said he, affecting a good humoured tone. “Here is wherewithal to support your strength;—take heart. Who can tell, but better luck awaits you. Come, let me loosen these fastenings. Inshallah, you may soon get rid of them entirely;—but how is this?” continued he, his voice changing to alarm and displeasure, “loosened already? Who has done this—hah?”

“Do you imagine that, since you thrust me into this cell, I have sat down to cry like a woman, or bleat like a lamb, without a struggle for something like freedom? I *have* struggled, and to some purpose, as you see. But why don’t you loose me entirely? My arms are stiff and swollen already, and as to escape, that is impossible with these walls around me. One might as well hope to get out of Jehannum!”

“By no means, comrade; that is out of the question just now,” replied the man, still evidently doubtful about the matter; “thus much may be permitted, for the rest, patience! In the meantime, come and eat. Set to—make yourself comfortable.”

“Pardon me, comrade; I shall eat, no doubt, but you must give me time. I am not used to eat in such harness as this; and if you won’t

take it off, I must eat at my leisure; so pray give me the food and leave me in quiet."

The man cast a suspicious look upon his prisoner, but, at length, set down the victuals and departed, leaving the young man alone to his own cogitations. These were far from comfortable. Had he wanted it before, there was now sufficient evidence that his life was in imminent danger, but this danger was not from open violence, as he, at first, expected; his life was to be taken treacherously and in secret. He was to perish by poison, not by the executioner's sword. There was, then, some influence in operation which controlled his persecutors; or why else was the latter mode abandoned? Why was he permitted to exist so long? But the comfort which this idea was calculated to produce was quenched by the reflection of his own powerlessness in the hands of his enemy, exposed, as he was, to the full force of his treacherous attempts, while his friends, far distant, were, probably, ignorant of his imminent peril; and the thought came over his heart with a chill that nipped the hope which had begun to bud there.

Drearily passed the day. In the evening his guard looked in again, inquired whether he had finished his meal, which Hoosseïn had contrived to dispose of out of sight, and after scrutinizing him with a searching eye, again

quitted the cell. By the second hour of night he returned, bringing more food, and inquiring after his captive's health, with an appearance of interest which gave poignant disgust to his intended victim : for oh, how Hoossein loathed the villain who he knew had come in hopes to hear his dying groans ! But the mind refuses to bear the constant torture of anxiety. The wretch upon the rack, after long suffering, has been known to close his eyes in sleep ; and Hoossein, wearied with fruitless conjecture and busy thought, at length sunk to rest.

How long he might have continued thus, he knew not ; but he woke under the impression of a frightful dream. He thought he had returned, he knew not how, once more to his village home, which smiled as it had done in days when it was prosperous and peaceful, and he was greeted by all the well known faces of those who once dwelt there. There was the good Hadjee ; the worthy Moollah ; the Kerbelai ; the village elders ; and his young companions came round him as they were wont to do, and greeted him with the frank kindness that characterized their habits and their natures. The maidens, too, were there, with their glad healthful looks and coy glances ; and she was among them, whose form was so deeply engraven on his heart, his Ausieh, and she smiled upon him, and beckoned him to approach ; but when

he sought to do so, an unseen force prevented them from meeting, and he was unable to reach her.

Sorely did he struggle to overcome the impalpable obstacle, but each effort still was frustrated. Some ominous shadow would ever fleet between, and he was baffled. First it was the old Hadjee, then the Kerbelai, both strangely distorted in form; and then came a crowd of wild figures with all who had figured in the late fearful scenes; his ruffian guards; Noor Shah with all his tribe of dervishes; his friend the horse-dealer; all were mingled together in dim confusion. In vain he sought to fix each passing form, for, as he gazed, they changed and mocked his fancy with a whirl of undefined images.

At length all seemed to melt into a single figure, which, grim and fearful, rose up, he knew not how, into gigantic size, and threatening him with a dagger brandished in one hand, caught Ausieh in the other with determined grasp. At her shrieks he made an effort to spring forward to her aid, when the giant, now become the Sheikh-ul-Islam, aimed a blow, with the dagger, at his head. Stepping backwards to avoid it, he fell powerless to the ground, and awoke, gasping with the gripe of the gigantic hand upon his throat. It was no dream, for a light which burst upon his unclosed eyes, flashed also on

the figure of a powerful man, whose hand, indeed, was on his throat, and whose knee was just descending on his breast.

Bound though he still was, the powerful instinct of self-preservation gave Hoossein strength for the occasion ; and, by an effort, he sprang from under the ruffian's gripe, which had been but imperfectly fastened, and, by the assistance of the fragments against which he had been leaning, gained his feet, and stood with his back to the wall, panting and glaring on his assailant, before the latter, who had been displaced and thrown off by the young man's sudden movement, could recover his balance.

“ Hah ! *goor-e-piderit* ! is it so ? Thou art strong it seems, Mashallah ! But it makes no difference, and will be the worse for thee in the end.”

“ Who art thou, then, man ? and what is thy purpose ?”

“ Hoh ! hoh ! Thou wouldest know who I am ? good ; thou shalt know. I am Hussun, the son of Allee, and a *Pehlewan** of the first class, at your service ; one from whose hands, when once well fastened, no man escapes with life. As for my business with thee, it needs not long to tell. It is to put thee to sleep, youth,

* Prize-fighter, wrestler.

to fit thee for thy shroud, which that worthy assistant of mine has brought along with him. Come, thou shalt sleep as soundly as ever nurse rocked babe. Hadst thou not struggled like a fool, just now, thou hadst by this time awoke in paradise or Jehannum, and never known how thou camest to be there. But now thou wilt go to thy place, in either, with thine eyes open. So Bismillah! the less trouble thou givest me, the better for thyself! Come, be patient then. Takee, hold the lantern up."

So saying, the wrestler, striking on his arms and clapping his hands together, after the fashion of these people when about to close with an antagonist, rushed towards his intended victim with intent to seize him by the throat. But Hoossein, with a courage and presence of mind, which even the desperate nature of his condition did not deprive him of, watched his time and rapidly lifted his foot, as the ruffian sought to close, struck him so violent a blow in the pit of the stomach, as to throw him backwards on the ground. Hopeless as he was of succour, but resolved never to abandon life while he could struggle for it, the youth now called aloud for aid, and upbraided the baffled ruffian in bitter terms for the cowardice of his attack upon a man bound and unarmed.

“May curses seize thee for a misbegotten dog!” exclaimed the enraged wrestler. “Thou shalt pay well for this yet. I will break every bone in thy dirt-defiled carcass, ere thou diest; so prepare thyself, and try if thou canst again teach Hussun Pehlewan to touch the earth.”

With increased fury but greater caution did the ruffian again advance upon the devoted youth, and in vain did Hoossein now attempt to defend himself. Catching hold of the limb, with which he sought again to keep off his enemy, the experienced Pehlewan easily threw him on the ground, where for a moment, he gazed on his prostrate prey, and vented a laugh of scorn before proceeding to glut his vengeance.

Hoossein half stunned by the shock, could no longer struggle against his fate; all, he felt, was now over; the dungeon would conceal his mangled body, and Ausieh never even hear of his fate—of his efforts to serve her. He closed his eyes in despair. The ruffian’s grasp was again upon his neck. When his ear, almost closed to human sounds, was electrified by a voice which pronounced the words, “Hold wretch!” in tones that thrilled through every nerve. In a moment, he felt himself released, and opening his eyes, saw that the Pehlewan had been seized by a man who grappled with

him fiercely; but unable from his bonds to aid the efforts of the friendly stranger, and sickened by the injuries he had sustained, he could only gaze with eagerness upon the deadly struggle.

The Pehlewan, powerful of limb and well skilled in his trade made fierce resistance, while his opponent, smaller far in size, but active and keen sighted as a lynx, maintained the advantage he appeared to have gained at first, and not only resisted all the giant efforts to disengage himself, but increased the waste of strength and fatigue, which his well chosen grasp produced, by the most skilful twistings of his own body. After a few desperate struggles, however, the wrestler finding that he could not disengage himself, attempted to crush his enemy upon the ground, by throwing himself down above him; but the other with cat-like agility contrived to shift his position so as to fall uppermost, thus forcing his antagonist to fall heavily, while he inflicted a desperate blow upon his chest.

The whole, which like the short but furious contest of two tigers had passed with the rapidity of lightning, was rendered dimly visible by the half expiring lantern, which on the first alarm had been dropped by the wrestler's assistant. But Hoosseïn's attention was forcibly recalled to his own situation by

the approach of the latter, knife in hand, to complete the unfinished work of his principal. Helpless as he was, the fate of Hoosseïn would now no doubt have been decided, in spite of the unlooked for aid of his unknown champion, when another agent appeared in the field, and the wretched assistant, dagger and all was dashed to the ground, by the club of one whose fierce glittering eyes, even as seen by the dying light, proclaimed him no other than his late companion and guide Noor Shah.

“Enough, look to the light,” said a voice, which, now quite tranquil and composed, he recognised at once as that of Allee Neemroo; and the lantern being raised and trimmed, the young man discovered in this friend, the champion who had thus saved his life, and who had just risen from the earth, on which lay the motionless body of the wrestler. Calm and unmoved, as if nothing extraordinary had passed, without a feature swollen or distorted, or even a quick drawn breath, did Allee advance towards his young friend, who was gazing on him with immeasurable astonishment.

“Allah-il-ullah! then it is thou, best of friends!” said he, labouring with strong emotion. “Thank God for this! Much as I bless his name for this wonderful deliverance, I am

doubly gratified that thou hast been made its instrument!"

"Yes, young man, it is your friend; and he not less than thou thanks the Omnipotent, that he has been permitted to aid thee, thou whose own rash imprudence has so nearly thwarted all the efforts of thy friends to save thee! Is the state in which I find thee here, the consequence of following my counsel or the dictates of thine own impatient spirit? But enough, it is past, thy life is now safe; and though thou wilt still have to bear restraint, it shall at least be accompanied with less discomfort than thou hast suffered here. Bismillah! rise and follow me."

While Allee spoke, Noor Shah had released the arms of Hoosseïn, who still numbed and sore, could scarcely stand upright. The desire of freedom from his noisome prison, however, lent him strength, and leaning upon Allee, he turned to quit the cell. The discomfited wrestler and his prostrated assistant still lay motionless, whether dead or alive, Hoosseïn could not judge; but there they were suffered to remain, while the late prisoner and his friends left the place, and taking their way through several passages and ruinous vaults, reached the open street.

The dawn had not yet made its appearance, though the crowing of cocks proclaimed it near

at hand; but before it broke, or the stillness of early morning was disturbed by the movement of a single human being, Hoossein found himself disposed in a comfortable and well-furnished apartment, upon a good bed, where he was left to resume the repose which had been so fearfully interrupted in his late abode.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REBUKE.

EARLY on the morrow after the event we have just described, the Sheikh-ul-Islam was seated as usual in his khelwut. A slight contraction of the dark brows alone denoted internal emotion, as he combed his dark and bushy beard, and smoothed his glossy mustachios. More than once he stopped as if to listen, as some faint and distant noise reached his ear, or fancy might suggest the fall of an approaching footstep. At length he clapped his hands, and the same attendant we have already noticed, pushing aside the *purdeh* of the entrance, stood before him.

"No tidings yet? has no one come from the prison?" asked the Sheikh.

"No one, my lord," replied the attendant.

"Strange! what can it mean? Go send to the dungeon at the Hummaum, and learn what the prisoner there is about, and whether

Hussun Pehlewan, or Sheer Allee, has been there. Quick, let me know."

The time which elapsed till the return of the messenger thus despatched, though not exceeding a quarter of an hour, appeared an age to the Sheikh-ul-Islam, whose mind secretly a prey to the terrors of guilt already misgave him, and who apprehended some untoward event. Well might he, who was practising treachery towards others, fear somewhat of the same nature from others towards himself! He knew the man who had now declared himself opposed to his cruel and unprincipled measures, and ruminated, with uneasy anticipations, over his late conversation with the horse-dealer. The countenance of his servant, when he returned, confirmed the Sheikh's apprehensions; but impatient of an instant's delay, he sternly demanded to know what had occurred.

"My lord," replied the attendant, "the messenger declares, that when he went to the prison, he found the door closed and locked, as usual, but on going to the lodging of Sheer Allee, neither he nor the key were to be found, and he has returned to know what my lord would direct to be done."

"Let Allee Asker Gholaum be sought for; and if neither he, nor Sheer Allee can immediately be found, let the prison door be broken open."

Having given these orders, the Sheikh smoothing his brow, by an effort which cost him no small pains, turned his attention to other business, and admitted several persons to a morning audience; the penance paid for popularity by many an aching heart, though less guilty than that of the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân, which seeks to cloak its hidden ills under the semblance of tranquillity.

An hour had almost gone by, and the Sheikh was still supporting the inward torture of suspense with a placid brow, when the attendant entering, and whispering some words in his ear, he courteously dismissed his auditors, on the plea of urgent business; and being alone, demanded the cause of the consternation which was painted in his servant's countenance.

"My lord," replied the man, with some hesitation, "your servant desires to be pardoned for the strange and evil news he has to tell. Allee Asker being also out of the way, the messenger having procured assistance proceeded to the prison, and obeyed the order of the Huzoor, in breaking open the door. On entering, they at first neither heard nor saw anything; silence alone was there. Advancing, however, and directing their lanterns around, they discovered two bodies prostrate on the floor; but on examining them, their hearts turned to water, and their brains were dried up

with astonishment, at finding them to be those of Hussun Pehlewan, and Sheer Allee !”

“ How villain ?—how sayest thou ? Impossible !”

“ Pardon your servant, my lord, but it is the truth !”

“ Allah-il-ullah ! Allah-il-ullah !” muttered the Sheikh. “ But say on, what more ? How did this happen ? Was the prisoner there ?”

“ No, my lord, there was no one else there ; and how the matter happened, who can tell ? Sheer Allee was barely alive, his skull beaten in as with the blow of a mighty club ; his dagger drawn and lying on the ground beside him, just where it had fallen from his hand. He groaned but could not speak. Hussun was stretched near him, senseless and speechless, but without apparent wound. From the torn and twisted condition of his garments, it would seem that he had been struggling hard ; and in truth, my lord, it must have been with Jins, for who is there of the race of Adam, that could have reduced Hussun Pehlewan to the state he now lies in ?”

“ Jins ? Devils ! Fools !” exclaimed the Sheikh-ul-Islam, in towering indignation. “ Is this the way, then ? Baffled in everything ? Shall all the effects of so much prudence and skill, all my well-earned power, all my former fortune to be swept away in a moment, by the

breath of one—man or devil ! which must he be called ? Go, let Hussun Pehlewan be carefully tended ; if he return to his senses, let me know—begone !”

Left to himself, the Sheikh-ul-Islam fell into a painful fit of musing. The fiery blood coursed rapidly along his veins, kindling his whole frame to fury ; yet ever and anon the thrill of doubt and apprehension would shoot through his frame, and chill the moisture that gathered on his brow. There was that within him which whispered danger and defeat ; which told him that the hour of retribution might arrive, and that the blood he had shed, and the ruin he had caused, might yet be visited on his own head. Whence else this sudden turn of fortune against one who hitherto had seemed to command his fate, and in a contest with so despicable a foe ? Whence the unwonted feeling of depression, which he could not but admit weighed down his very soul ? Yet the haughty spirit still remained erect, and like the fallen angel he scornfully rejected every thought of repentance, and defied alike the powers of earth and Heaven.

While still agitated by this tempest of unholy emotions, the servants again sought admittance, and announced that the horse-dealer desired to have access to the presence. The

Sheikh started, as if bitten by an adder ; and had he indeed seen and felt the reptile, his loathing and dislike could not have been greater than what he really felt, and partly betrayed, while giving permission for the entrance of his enemy.

The calm and imperturbable demeanour of Allee at all times exercised a powerfully sedative influence upon the Sheikh ; and on this occasion, the effect produced was more remarkable from the excited state of fury in which the visitor found him. The hatred, not unmingled with fear which he felt for his quondam friend, was doubtless at this moment particularly strong in his bosom ; yet the exigence of the occasion restored his self-possession, and enabled him to smooth his features so as to receive the horse-dealer with at least the semblance of tranquillity. Coldly tendering him the customary salutation, he inquired the cause of this early repetition of his visit, and desired to be made acquainted with his wishes.

“The cause of this my second, and not very welcome visit, Mehdee, is thine own treachery, and falsehood ; treachery which, as I warned thee, should such be attempted, has recoiled upon thyself, for the loss sustained or yet to be sustained falls on thee alone.”

“Barikillah, Allee ! well saith the proverb, that thorns produce not grapes, nor thistles the

melons of Ispahan. Thy breeding is shown in thy country. What meanest thou by treachery and falsehood? Thou eatest dirt, thyself, man?"

"What mean I, askedest thou? I will tell thee, Mehdee. I had thy promise, that the life of the youth, Hoossein Kerbelai, should be safe; that his comfort should be looked to; and on this assurance, was I content to leave him as a royal prisoner, in thy hands. And how hast thou fulfilled that promise?—not merely by retaining in bonds his already numbed limbs, that he might be powerless to resist attack, but by sending assassins to his prison, to kill him as he slept. That is my meaning; that is what I call treachery and falsehood."

"Allah! said I not truly that thou eatest dirt, comrade?" What know I of these things?—when did I send murderers and assassins to kill in the night? Thou hast but dreamed all this, or thine ear has been abused by foolish reports. The youth, no doubt, is well in his prison: and for his bonds, if they still gall him, order shall be given for relaxing or removing him. Wullah! all we require is, that he be secure. Art thou content?"

"Content! Oh! Mehdee, how hast thou fallen, when thy proud spirit can stoop to falsehoods and subterfuges so gross as these!

The youth, Mehdee, *is* well, he *is* secure; for he now is in *my* power, and not in *thine*. The Omnipotent, who abandons not the innocent, nor suffers the proud and the unjust to triumph for ever, has seen fit to preserve him, and to smite the assassins who would have murdered him. To tell thee this was the object of my visit, and to warn thee once more that further attempts of this sort will but aggravate thy danger. Yet, shall not my word to thee be broken, for with me, Mehdee, pledges are sacred. The mandate of the Shah shall be respected. Thou goest to Ispahan, the youth shall still accompany thee as prisoner, but not under thy care. I will myself watch over his life until his fate shall, after fair and impartial trial, be determined by the voice of his sovereign. Thou best knowest how thine own character may stand the test of such an investigation. This is what I had to say, and now I leave thee. May Allah turn thy heart to better things, for greatly doth it need a change !”

Having said these words, Allee Neemroo rose and quitted the apartment without further question or interruption from the Sheikh-ul-Islam, whose rage and confusion were too great to vent themselves in speech.

The morning was well advanced, before Hoossein started from the deep sleep into which he had fallen. There was a bustle in his apart-

ment, and among the voices which were heard his ear was struck by some familiar tones ; but harassed and bewildered, his mind filled with images of the trying scenes that had so lately passed, he could not immediately remember where he was ; and imagining himself beset, he sprung from his couch with purpose to defend himself. His arms, still stiff and sore from the long continued pressure of his bonds, reminded him of his prison and his murderous guards ; and it was not till the well-known voice again spoke, and a form that could not be mistaken rushed towards him, that he comprehended the truth—that it was his own devoted *humsheereh*, his faithful Caussim, who was clasping his knees and kissing his hands over and over again.

“ Alhumdulillah ! I see thee again ! Alhumdulillah ! I see thee again ! ” sobbed he. “ Ai wahi ! Ai wahi ! what thou hast suffered ! Dust on my head for leaving thee ! Why did I ever consent ? but they shall part us no more, Hoossein, they shall never part us again ! ” And Hoossein, overcome with emotion, fell on his foster-brother’s neck and wept.

The entrance of Allee Neemroo put an end to this scene, and after inquiring how his guest had slept, he advised him to refresh himself with a bath, which would remove the pain and fatigue he still felt in his limbs. “ For the

present I must leave you," said he, " but in the afternoon I shall return, Inshallah ! when we must have some conversation together, and you shall learn something more of what may of late have perplexed you, than could hitherto have been prudently communicated ; in the meantime, remain quietly within these walls, where you are safe ; you have seen that danger awaits you beyond them."

CHAPTER VIII.

STORY OF THE HORSE-DEALER.

IN the evening, according to his promise, Allee Neemrco made his appearance, and after sharing with his friend a comfortable meal, and smoking a calleeoon by the side of a cheerful fire, turned the discourse upon the subject of his late adventures. "You have had many narrow escapes," he observed, "and they ought to teach you greater prudence in future. Had it not been for a more fortunate conjunction of chances, than usually falls to the lot of man, not less than to the power which has been vigilant over you, you could not have escaped destruction. But enough of this; you are desirous, I know, to learn the nature of this vigilant influence which has enveloped you ever since you set foot in this city, and which has shaped out many of the events that have of late befallen you, as well as some of earlier occurrence; and I shall now proceed to give

you more insight into these matters than circumstances before permitted. In order to make matters clear, however, I must begin with some account of myself, and the history of my own early days.

“ You have heard that I am a Buchtiaree, and the son of a muleteer; and this may possibly be true, though I cannot positively affirm the fact. Of my early childhood I have but very confused recollections, and the first I can distinctly recall are of the man whom I called my father, with his mules and yaboos, and our life of constant travelling from one place to another. He was a harsh and brutal man, who made me work hard from the moment I could put my hand to a mule-rope or halter, and who thought nothing of laying over my back the steel chain with which he thrashed his beast, if he saw me idling or disobedient. He fed me well, however; and though hard work and exposure might somewhat stint my stature, it strengthened my muscles and knit my joints into firmness, while the salubrious exercise of travelling confirmed a naturally strong frame and hardy constitution.

“ I need not repeat what you have already heard of my reputed father's death, and my own consequent destitution. Nor would the history of my boyish pranks, for the next few years, be worth the time it would take to re-

late. The accident, to which I owe the deformity of this unlucky countenance, was the turning point in my life, for it led to the means of opening and unbrutalizing my mind, already much depraved by the intercourse it had held with the low and unprincipled among mankind; of pointing out the value of knowledge, and inspiring me with a desire to acquire it; and, above all, of introducing me to, and uniting me with the agents of a power which has, from the earliest ages, exercised an almost incredible influence over men.

“Wounded and bruised almost to death, I was taken up by those who had been my fellow-servants, and laid before the cell of an aged dervish, who, for some time past, had inhabited the ruins of an Imaunzadeh, near the village, and who had gained great celebrity by the cures he had effected on the sick and wounded in the neighbourhood. He carried me at once, insensible as I was, into his cell, and laying me on his bed of straw and rags, he washed and examined my wounds, fomenting them with a decoction of herbs from his medicinal stores.

“But not even his skill could avert the fever caused by the severity of the injuries I had sustained, nor preserve the eye, which had been totally destroyed by them, together with much of the substance of my face. It saved

my life, however: yet, when after weeks of suffering, during which my host treated me with the most unwearied tenderness, I rose from the dervish's couch a miserable, hideous object, disgusting to others and loathsome to myself, I scarcely felt disposed to thank the care that had preserved me. My heart was full of bitterness and gall, and I conceived a hatred to the rest of my species, as if they had been accessory to my misfortune, or as if their untarnished beauty, and looks of happiness and unconcern, insulted and derided my deformity.

“The dervish, whose naturally powerful mind had been enlarged and enlightened by travel and acute observation of mankind, knew well the secret workings of the human breast; and though deeply versed in the mystic sciences, and given to contemplative study, had not lost sight of the experience he had acquired in the world while pursuing objects of speculative inquiry. He saw the condition of my mind; and, having healed my body, set himself to cure my mental malady. Taciturn and distant by habit, he seldom spoke without an urgent motive, to express some want, or give vent to some original opinion drawn forth by passing events. By such apothegmatic observations, and apologues suited to the occasion, rather than by reasoning and remonstrance, did he seek to effect his purpose; and, in so doing,

he evinced his wisdom and just perception of character; for, at that time I was foolish and wayward, and my wounded spirit would have secretly spurned formal reproof, even had respect for my preserver induced me to receive it from his lips with seeming humility.

“He pointed out to me, in this way, the absurdity of measuring the value of men by their external appearances, quoted to me the examples of Locman and Illij Guz,* the Atta Beg, and others, who, rejected by the superficial judgments of common men, had justified the discrimination of their more keen sighted patrons, and proved their title to the highest esteem of mankind. He pointed out from this the importance not only of appreciating the worth of others by some equitable standard, but of learning to arrive at a correct estimate of ourselves, and taught me to treat with contempt or indifference the opinions of the fools and knaves who make up the bulk of mankind.

“‘You wince,’ would he say, ‘under the contemptuous glance or commiserating look of one of those village churls; do you then admit their superiority in aught but external appearance? Are they even stronger than you are for your years? Are you not able to perform

* Founder of the race of Attabegs of Azerbaijan, who rose to the rank of a prince from that of a slave.

every feat that they can do, and more? And as to mental qualifications, do you not feel that, were fortune to raise you to a higher condition in life, you have powers that would maintain you there, while their conduct under a similar change, would mark them out as base pretenders and misplaced usurpers? I know you, Allee, and I can read resolution and decision in your mind. There are points in your character which may tell against success, but you have talents and mental powers sufficient, if duly brought into action, to raise you to any height you please.'

"His lessons were not fruitless. Confidence returned to my soul, but bitterness would not depart from it; I felt as one deserted by my species, a creature alone in a hostile world. I remembered the hardships of my youth, the persecutions I had endured from my fellow servants, their desertion of me at the moment of my worst need. I judged of mankind generally by these unfair examples, and felt rather a hostility towards them than any desire to mix with them again. As for my preserver, the dervish, I regarded him as one of another world, separated from that of my enemies of mankind as widely as if he dwelt in another sphere. I loved him with enthusiasm, I would have died to do him service. He saw the morbid feeling that was consuming my soul, and

reasoned with me on my perverseness; I admitted the fact, and bowed to his rebuke, but declared that to alter was impossible. Soured and disappointed, I sought to fly the world rather than live in it. The life of my friend pleased me, and respecting and loving him as I did, I earnestly desired to resemble him in all things, and intimated this wish to him, and proposed to become his disciple and to turn dervish.

“The dervish, who was known by the appellation of Sheikh-Abd-ul-Kâder, shook his head at this proposal. ‘You know not what you desire, my son,’ said he; ‘disgusted with your own lot, and living with me as you have done in peace, you believe my life to be tranquil and free from care and trouble, and therefore would embrace a similar one. It is the ignorance of inexperience that prompts you to this desire; you judge alone by what appears, forgetting what may be unseen. He, who delights in the bloom of the garden and revels in its fruits, knows little of the toil and pains which these flowers and fruits have cost. The youth, who gazes on the grandeur of the court, envies the monarch who commands that dazzling pomp and power; but thinks not of the cares that plant thorns on the royal pillow, of the dangers that hang unseen over the regal diadem. Thus the novice, who gazes on the unruffled

brow of his teacher, forgets the years of painful study, of penance, of fasting, and of prayer required to produce that heavenly calm of mind, which sets its impress on the tranquil countenance. Believe me, my son, thy mind is of too active a character to do without the world, and the world, in its turn, has its claims upon an ardent genius like thine.'

" 'I know not father,' replied I, 'what you mean by abandoning the world; I see that you as well as many other dervishes and fakeers, so far from quitting the world, appear not only to live in it, but to enjoy it, and that without the cares and dangers which imbitter it to other men.'

" 'Ay, my son, thus it is, just as I have said, that men judge superficially and falsely. Many a dervish and fakeer there is who has nothing of his profession beyond the *taj* and *kirkhah*.* The leopard's skin and ashes cover many an idle and worthless pretender, whom laziness and sloth, not love of truth and virtue, have led to abandon the active pursuits of life; and many a sensual abandoned hypocrite, many an impudent cheat and unprincipled pretender, takes privilege under the matted locks or cotton cap, to roam abroad at will, existing on the charity, or preying upon the

* Dervishes cap and vest of rags.

weakness of mankind; enjoying the passing hour without thought for the next has so many charms for the idle or the vicious, that any form or mode of life, which promises such advantages, is eagerly embraced by men without principle or reflection. But call not these dervishes, nor believe that such a life can lead to real happiness of mind or ease of body. When the mind is debased, indeed, by sensual grovelling pleasures, these may, for a season, be enjoyed, as they are by the beasts that perish; but like them, too, shall such men perish miserably, and being forgotten in this world, shall have their portion for ever in the unknown horrors of the next. No, my son, the true dervish has other objects of desire. The mind, which is fixed upon the glories of the Omnipotent, and that pants for heavenly knowledge, regards with contempt the objects of human passion; and however a man of this order may mingle with his fellow mortals, his spirit, abstracted from the busy scene around him, is fixed on his Creator alone!

“ ‘ Remember, my son, the great objects of the true Sooffee is TRUTH, that truth which dwells in God, and, emanating from HIM, is diffused throughout his whole creation, existing every where and in every thing. You will say, why seek what is obvious and universal? But the weakness and wickedness of our terres-

trial nature continually tend to obscure the divine image, and obstruct the efforts of the soul to mingle with, and ultimately to rejoin its glorious original. To vanquish in this conflict, to purge away the grosser earthly and erring dross, so that the soul may mount unfettered, and flee unchecked, and fitted to re-unite with the parent all-creating essence; this is the business of the Sooffee upon earth, and it is an arduous and terrible warfare; the spirit against its earthly tabernacle. A whole age of self-restraint and penance, of rigid fasting and continual prayer, of self-inflicted tortures and abstinence the most austere has often been endured, in vain, by the most zealous disciples.

“ ‘Often has the frail vessel of clay given way and been dissolved under the searching ordeal; and even when that ordeal has been successfully sustained, the spirit has been so tried with various disappointments, that the brain has been bewildered, and the sore-tried aspirant has fallen into the horrors of despair. Such is the trial, such the fearful conflict to which thou, my son, wouldst expose thyself, overlooking, like too many others of thy age, the perils of the course, and seeing only the prize of perfect peace, and joy, and power, which is the reward of conquest; forgetting also that this ineffable and exalted bliss is unappreciable, intangible, by those who have not fitted them-

selves for its enjoyment by the previous and needful preparation.

“ ‘ It is from the utter extinction of all worldly feelings in the breast of the *Arufeh*,* that he becomes susceptible of the enjoyment of this bliss ; and those alone, who have endured that process of mortification, can taste the delights it bestows. The perfected dervish mingles with the world not as taking share in its unholy works and vanities, but to perform the part assigned him by his Maker, in improving the condition of his brother worms of mankind, in alleviating their distresses, enlightening their ignorance ; and while receiving from them the pittance required for the sustenance of his terrestrial frame, bestowing on them the far more important benefits which he has been commissioned and qualified to dispense among the children of Adam. He is free from solicitude, not only because he has no worldly wealth to lose, but because, happen what will, his sources of happiness are beyond the reach of fate ; and death itself can but lead to a more perfect re-union of his soul with the eternal source from which it emanated at first.

“ ‘ And now, my son, that I have in some sort described the profession and prospects of a true dervish as they ought to be, thinkest

* Or *men of knowledge*, a high degree in Sooffeeism.

thou that it is a path which thou art suited to pursue?’

“‘But, father,’ replied I after a pause of some minutes, during which I hastily reflected on all which the old man had been saying; ‘the dervish has surely other objects and pursuits than those which thou hast just described? Many of those whom we see, among them thyself, assuredly are men of great learning, skilled in many useful and curious arts. They are travellers, too, who have visited remote lands, and seen the wonders of Allah in every quarter of the world. It seems to me that I could bear much, were it to lead to such knowledge and experience.’

“‘It is true, my son, that learning and science are among the objects of the dervish; but they are to be sought for only as means to an end. Many, no doubt, lose sight, unfortunately, of that end, in attaining the means only, and pursue the search beyond the due bounds of prudence. Thus men have become dazzled by the charms of magic, and been led to form compacts with unholy spirits, jins and afreetes—creatures both above and below the nature of the children of Adam; powerful servants when subjected by, and, in the holy name,—terrible masters when empowered in wrath to become the instruments of punishment for evil deeds.

“‘As for travelling, it is the duty of the

dervish. The study of the Creator's works, the wonders of his arm in many lands, are his true and proper exercises ; but this does not supersede and ought not to interfere with the higher duties of contemplation, and fasting and prayer—of *Tepessieh* in short, which alone could fit the student's mind for rising to the higher states of perfection, and to the beatification he aspires to enjoy. Nay, more, should they be sought for purposes of amusement and the gratification of curiosity, losing sight of the great and ultimate object of all his efforts, the unworthy aspirant will be thrown back in his career. Ponder then, my son, and decide not hastily or rashly. Reflect on what I have said ; consider it well, and then come to me again !

“The words of the dervish had, no doubt, furnished me with food for thought. There was something so sincere and earnest in his manner, so much of holy ardour and mysterious solemnity in the character of his discourse, that I was deeply impressed by every thing he said. All the enthusiasm in my nature was roused. I felt that I was capable of penance, fasting, torture—any thing to gain the high reward which the dervish had so mystically described.

“It is true that the delights of travelling, of seeing wonders, of dark mysterious sciences,

and even of power over the creatures of fire and air, and the knowledge of hidden things, were mixed up with those purer aspirations ; but there was a grandeur in the aggregate that acted like a charm upon my young and inexperienced mind, and confirmed me in my resolution to become the *Mooreed* of my good friend Sheikh-Abd-ul-Kâder, and to rise, Inshallah ! to the highest grades of Sooffeeism ; to become myself a *Khaleefah*,* in good time. Thus excited, my resolution was soon formed, and after waiting for a full day, that my resolve might not appear too sudden or inconsiderate in his eyes I declared to my friend that I was ready to enter at once on my noviciate, to endure all privations, and submit to all penances, in the hopes of attaining the reward to which all dervishes aspired, the knowledge of, and identification with the *truth*. That I should henceforth Inshallah ! regard him as my *peer*,† and myself as his humblest and most devoted *mooreed*.

“The Sheikh received the expression of my determination with the calm and sedate, yet benevolent demeanour, which was one of his marked characteristics. ‘ Well my son,’ said he, ‘ thou hast chosen a thorny path. Allah grant thou repent not the choice ! I cannot clear away the thorns ; but I will do my best

* A teacher of the first order.

† Religious instructor and disciple.

to aid thee in securing the rose of heavenly peace and truth, which grows beyond them for the virtuous and the persevering, in the Paradise to which it leads. From this time accordingly, my master directed his conversation to subjects connected with the doctrines of the sect to which he belonged, and endeavoured to imbue me with a fuller conception of the exalted aspirations, which should fill the breast of sincere and resolved disciples. I listened to him with interest and reverence, though I cannot deny, that my mind would sometimes experience a throe of impatience for possession of the secret and mysterious knowledge, for which I had always sighed ; and I longed for the time when the Sheikh might see fit to indulge the love of travel and adventure, which burned in my breast.

“This last wish, at least, was not long unfulfilled. The Sheikh one day informed me, that he was about to quit the abode, where he had now sojourned for two years ; and that his intention was to proceed to the eastward. To the east ! I was overjoyed. The east, was to my uninformed apprehension, a land of luxury and wonder, the abode of everything dazzling and delightful. India, Kathay, and I know not what other mysterious and magnificent countries, lay all in the east. With what alacrity then did I prepare to follow my

master thither? Few preparations indeed were required, all that we had or wanted we carried on our persons. The dress I had worn as an attendant on my late master, was exchanged for one more suitable to the new profession I had chosen : a water vessel of the sea cocoa nut shell, a nargilleh or pipe, with tobacco and other smoking apparatus, a wallet for food, a small iron pot to dress it in, sandals on our feet, and stout iron-shod clubs in our hands; these with a few simples and strings of holy beads, formed our equipment, and forth we walked on a delicious autumnal morning, with our faces set to the east.

“ I never shall forget the sensations of that hour; calmly and peacefully as my life had passed for the few previous months, and sincerely as I was attached to the excellent and venerable sage who had preserved it, I could not help feeling that it was a state of virtual thralldom, a repose utterly at variance with my active restless spirit. I had fretted in secret, under the unwelcome restraint, and now hailed with keen delight the prospect of release. The cold grey light of dawn was yielding to the warmer tints, which the sun, still hid behind the eastern mountains, shot up towards the zenith, as the Sheikh who had passed much of the night in contemplation, took the last long whiff of his nargilleh, and handing it to me,

rose from his seat, and with a muttered prayer, pronounced the Bismillah !

“ Out we sallied ; and I could scarcely refrain from relieving my pent up spirits, by running and leaping like a boy. A boy ! and what else in truth was I then ? Since that time how much has passed to sober the exuberant spirits. How much of pain and misery, ay, and of *crime* too, with its never failing follower, remorse ! But enough of this. On we went visiting the towns and cities of Khorasan, in each of which we dwelt some days, meeting in all some brethren of our order, who received my master with profound respect.

“ At Meshed, the holy, as it is called, we found a multitude of religious ascetics, and mendicants of every denomination ; but far more of pretenders, than sincere followers of their profession. Many of them were in disguise, for in a place the very centre of what is termed orthodox religion, the home of priests and Moollahs, the strong-hold of bigotry and intolerance, it seldom can be safe for one opposed, or thought to be so, to such persons and their opinions, to appear openly ; but I found that the several orders had their own means of recognising one another, and holding constant communication together ; and it became clear to me, that much was passing among them, which had not always reference to their religious exercises and profession.”

“Here too, I had occasion to see much of the habits of those rogues and impostors who, from indolence or love of ease and pleasure, assume the habits of the dervish; and I ought to blush to say, that the joyous recklessness of their mode of life, and the amusing and wicked adventures which they had encountered according to their own accounts, had often the effect of giving me a wish to join them: but the powerful hold which my own Sheikh still possessed over my mind and my affections, and which kept alive my better resolves, preserved me, for the time, from falling into the snares that were so thickly set around me.

“I left Mushed with some reluctance, for there was much in the place that arrested my fancy, and afforded food for observation. Our next stage was Herât, which in some respects offered a still wider and more attractive field, in as much as the place was larger and richer, and the treasures of both east and west might be seen in its bazaars. But to me, whose object was to regard man rather than inanimate matter, and who loved to study character rather than to lounge in a dazzling market place, Mushed was on the whole a scene of greater interest. Still advancing eastward, we passed the Doorâunee country to Kandahar, where the scene in some degree was altered, and the Hindoo garb, which at Herât appeared but here and there among the crowd, became more frequent

and we found many of the Indian ascetics, whose peculiarities and extraordinary self-inflicted penances are so well known and wonderful.

“Among the first of those we saw, was a man whose only covering was a thick smearing of ashes, with matted hair which hung down his back, and a rope of hair around his waist. He was a tall gaunt figure, who had carried his right arm raised perpendicularly up until it had stiffened and withered in that position, while the nails of his fingers had grown through the clenched hand. I have seen many and far more hideous objects of the kind since then, but none whose appearance made a stronger impression on me. The language of these people formed a bar to free intercourse on my part, but my master, and those of our order more advanced, were able, I could see, to communicate with them upon points of mystic knowledge.

“To detail to you our course and adventures, as we continued our progress towards Hindoostan, would occupy more time than I can now spare, or you would be inclined to bestow upon the narrative. We took our way through the southern Affghan tribes, were generally well received, always remunerating our hosts with some advice or aid to their sick ; and after visiting Shikarpore, we held up the stream to Moulân.

From thence we returned to Bhawulpore, and crossed the desert by Bhutnere and Hissar to Shahjehanabad,* the magnificent capital of the descendants of Timoor.

“There, at this time, reigned the mighty Aurungzebe, the greatest monarch of his time; a strict ascetic and bigoted religionist himself, but a determined foe to all orders of fakeers and dervishes, whose enthusiastic hostility had more than once shaken his very throne; yet strange and inconsistent as it may sound, it was no uncommon thing for this strictly orthodox monarch, himself, to visit certain saints and *Aulias*,† who though bred up in, and possessing the Mahomedan faith, had in reality, by study and contemplation attained to the light of truth, and were Sooffees of the most accomplished class.

“A monarch like Aurungzebe, and a court like that of Dehlee, offered matter the most interesting for philosophical inquiry; and the Moghul capital detained us long within its precincts. Austere in disposition, and simple to excess in his habits, there was less of state and show to meet the eye than of real power and riches; and it was instructive to mark how the tone of order, regularity, and promptness, given by the sovereign, pervaded every rank

* The Mahomedan name for Dehlee.

† One of the highest grades among religious ascetics.

and office down to the lowest functionary. Here too, did we meet with numbers of these extraordinary ascetics and exemplary sages, who in spite of the dangers arising from the monarch's bigotry, flocked to the numerous shrines of Dehlee and took up their abode among the ruinous relics of its ancient greatness. The wonders of the capital were inexhaustible; but nothing was more striking than the habits and histories of these remarkable religious mendicants, who, far more numerous, though less widely spread abroad than in Persia, congregate in armies of thousands and tens of thousands, and dispute the sway with princes and with emperors. Here was food for a novice! Truly, Hindoostan is the very birth-place and strong-hold of Sooffeeism.

“Pursuing the great object of my Peer, the search after divine truth, and intercourse with those who had made the greatest progress towards its attainment, we proceeded to perambulate Hindostan, visiting Ajmere, which was the residence of a celebrated Aulia, and the celebrated Pokhur, not far distant. From thence we returned to Multra, and Binderabun, where we saw abundance of Hindoo ascetics; but the greater part of them were little better than brutes, besotted, ignorant bigots, and devoid of even the smallest disposition to philosophical inquiry.

“ Our success at Benares, whither we next bent our way, was not much more satisfactory. We found, indeed, men whose austerities, and endurance of extreme self-inflicted penance, had divested them almost of the appearance of humanity. One was stretched upon a bed of nails, where for years he had lain, borne about upon the shoulders of his disciples. Another had worn a deep hole in his forehead, by beating it twice every day, a certain number of times upon one of the sacred *Lingams* of a certain temple. Another had placed himself for years upright in a pagoda, upon his hands, instead of his feet, with his head down, and his heels in the air, where his disciples fed him by means of suction through a tube, and his limbs were all stiffened into perfect rigidity, by the length of time they had remained in this painful posture. As for the numbers who had deformed their limbs and arms, and bodies, by various fantastical contortions, they were beyond all reckoning.

“ But after all, these were impostors, or madmen, after their sort, subjecting themselves to such tortures rather to make the world stare, and gain a reputation for sanctity, than from a genuine spirit of devotion, or a resolution to humble the proud heart, and purge away the dross of human passion, to fit the soul for converse with its Maker. Some few were

found, it is true, who, Hindoos though they were, and though born in the fetters of Brahman idolatry, had souls superior to their condition, and dared to search for truth beyond the precincts of the Pagoda, and the narrow dogmas of their faith. With these the Sheikh held many an interesting colloquy. But these bore no proportion to the concourse of fanatics, who thronged this first of Hindoo cities ; leaving it, therefore, we once more turned our faces westward, with intent to complete our pilgrimage by a more northern route.

“ Little of interest occurred for some time, until having again passed through Dehlee, we held our way towards the Punjab, where that remarkable sect of Seceders, from the Hindoo paganism, named the Sikhs, or Sings, still maintained their existence and religious liberty, against the power of Aurungzebe himself. At this period, their warlike leader, Gooroo Govind, their prophet, teacher, and ruler, was with indomitable courage and perseverance, struggling against a force which ought to have been able to crush him into dust. This personage, although the spiritual leader of his sect, was, in fact, nothing else at bottom, than a Sooffee of the first grade, who born to rule a small and insulated body of followers, and knowing well that this was only to be done, through the means of some peculiar system of

belief, ingrafted his own warlike doctrines upon those of his predecessor, Nanak, and thus established his authority upon the secure basis of religious enthusiasm.

“When we arrived at Loodheana, we found that the Gooroo was at Makawul, whither we accordingly directed our steps, as an interview with the ruler of this rising sect, was particularly desired by my Peer. We found him preparing to resist a fresh attack from the Moghul troops, surrounded by his Akhâlees, or “immortals,” a set of fanatics, resembling and probably composed of the several orders of Hindoo fakeers, the Jogees, the Byragees, the Sunyassees, who so frequently unite together in Hindostan, and who having embraced the Sikh faith retain the wild enthusiasm of their former character, in their new condition.

“The Gooroo was simply clad in blue, the sacred colour of his sect. His hand rested on the steel hilted sword, and a dagger mounted with the same was at his waist. Neither ornament, nor jewel did he wear; but his keen eye sparkled with intense lustre from beneath his lofty brow, above which rose a high turban, covering the greater portion of his long and cherished hair. All was plain and homely. Nothing sparkled about his own person, or those of his followers, but the bright steel to which they trusted for existence, and for victory.

“ His reception of the Sheikh was frank and cordial. A few sentences appeared to establish a perfect understanding between them ; and we remained at Makhawul for several days his guests. But the gloomy bigotry of the Emperor could not permit a band of sectaries like the Sikhs, neither Mussulmauns, nor Hindoos, to rest in peace. At the approach of a mighty army, under command of one of his sons, the Gooroo and his adherents were forced to quit Makhawul, and retire further into the mountains, and we pursued our way to the favourite valley of Cashmere. In this delightful place, although so eminently calculated for ravishing the senses, and seducing the hermit from the contemplation of his Maker, there were many zealous ascetics, who rigidly subjected themselves to the severest penances, and endured the most continued fasts, insomuch that they resembled skeletons rather than living men, but who had by these means, attained to a high celebrity and influence among the Sooffee saints. Some of these had numerous disciples, and many religious men and learned philosophers came from distant parts to listen to their precepts.

“ Here, too, it was, that first we met some of the *Roushuneah*, a sect who take their origin from Bayazeed, a celebrated Sooffee doctor of the days of Akber Padshah, and who

occasioned serious alarm to that monarch in Affghanistan. Few, indeed, have ever made more profound or successful researches into the deep mysteries of Divine truth ; and though his name has been dishonoured by men, who were too gross and corrupt themselves to comprehend his worth, it has left behind it a brightness which still gives light to his faithful followers. Such, at least, is the opinion of some of the most erudite Sooffee Sheikhs of this day.

“Among the fakeers who frequented the shrine of a celebrated Mahomedan Saint, situated in a remote angle of the valley, there was one whose blue eyes, light complexion and powerful frame, as well as the peculiar form of his features, proclaimed him for an Affghan, and who appeared strongly disposed to court the Sheikh’s society. It soon came out that he was one of the Roushuneah, and that, like ourselves, he was on his return, after a pilgrimage, to the principal shrine of the founder of his sect, which he vaunted to us as being the resort of many learned and pious Sooffees. It so happened that one of the objects of my Peer, in taking the route we had pursued, was to communicate with the leaders of this sect, and to visit their principal place of resort ; so that the offer of this person to conduct us as guide through a country so familiar to him, met

ready acquiescence, and after a few days we left Cashmere, for Futehpoor, of Hesht-nugger where Bayazeed, their *peer* and founder, died and was buried. His tomb, never magnificent, has now fallen into decay ; and indeed, the vulgar deny that his bones rest here at all. It is related that his son Sheikh Omar disinterred them, and carried them about with him as a protecting talisman in all his undertakings, and when he himself was defeated and put to death by the Moghuls, these relics of his father were irreverently thrown into the Sinde.

“ But his followers assert, that despite this sacrilege, the august bones were miraculously reconveyed to their original resting place, and were found there, surrounded by a halo of light which continued to illuminate the place for a month after the event. Be this as it may, the tomb, a small *Goombuz*, or dome, covering several small chambers, was now in ruins, but we found that it communicated with an extensive range of vaulted caverns known, or at least frequented, only by devotees of the sect, and their disciples.

“ On arriving there, we were introduced by our guide, who presented us to the principal *Khaleefah*, and made us acquainted with the ways of the place. Never shall I forget the effect which the sight of these regions of gloom had upon me. Long vaulted passages

dimly lighted by a small iron lamp placed here and there, or by a wandering ray of daylight admitted through a fissure from above, gave access to cells of different sizes, but all alike dark and dismal.

“The damp walls were clothed only with the slime of constant moisture, which dropped on the floors of earth or rock, and nourished abundance of noisome reptiles, for whose abode alone, it might be thought the place was fit: no dungeon for a criminal could be more loathsome. Yet none could say that the inmates were unsuited to their dwelling. I had seen in various parts of Hindostan, as I conceived, whatever was terrible or disgusting in devotional discipline; yet here were congregated a crowd of fanatics, which Benares itself could scarcely have equalled; for this was the secret retreat where all aspirants to the higher mysteries of the sect assembled to perform their probationary exercises and penances.

“Here was to be seen the performance of *Tepessieh* in all its forms and stages. In one cell might be seen a man of powerful frame, entirely denuded of vestments, just commencing his course of fasting, who sat immoveable with upturned eyes, while enduring the fierce gnawing of incipient hunger on a healthy frame. In another, the hollow, wolfish glare, despite the abstracted eye, betokened the effect of

these pangs upon the constitution after the keenest agony was past : while in others the dull apathetic gaze, not less than the wasted limbs, and dry skeleton-like frame, betrayed the deep inroads made by famine on the frail tenement of clay, and gave cause for dread that the *man* might sink under such unnatural privations, before the *saint* could rise pure and unsullied from the ruins of his earthly tabernacle.

“ But mere abstinence was not the only violence practised against nature by these stern devotees. The most painful discipline was resorted to, in order, as it appeared, to raise the character of the voluntary sufferer among his brethren. The true Dervishes and Soofees of Persia and of *Roum* direct their whole powers of mind to the acquisition of knowledge and science, as the means to the attainment of their one great end ; and confine their discipline for the most part to rigid self-denial, rigorous fasting and long persevering prayer ; while the sterner ascetics of Hindostan subject themselves, as I have told you, to the most dreadful and revolting self-tortures, as means of subduing the earthly and unholy principles of their nature, and leaving the spirit unfettered to seek the celestial union for which it pants. Many, no doubt, have no object in these self-inflctions beyond the praise and admiration of

men; for so perverse is human nature, that we see many people take such pains in acting the hypocrite to deceive their fellow men, which if honestly bestowed on acts of piety and virtue might secure them acceptance with their Creator.

“The Roushuneah appear to have taken their place between these two parties. Closely allied in their peculiar doctrines to the Ismaileans or Bâtunneah of old, the principle of blind and absolute devotion to their spiritual chief and leader had imbued them with a tone of greater austerity, and a gloomier spirit than were usual among the more independent dervishes of the west, while they seldom felt called upon to copy the savage practices of the Hindoo fanatics. At this time, however, from special causes a more than ordinary degree of severity prevailed amongst the sect.

“The misfortunes which it had suffered in its collisions with the power of the Moghul emperors, had thrown a shade over its prospects, which nothing, it was held, but the most strenuous exertions of all its members, could have any chance of removing; and among the means of gaining an influence over the wild Affghan tribes with whom they lived, superior sanctity, mysterious awe, and a conviction of supernatural power, were those which they chiefly relied on. The *Peers* and *Khaleefahs* of

the sect, themselves depending partly on the efficacy of prayer and penance to obtain their ends, and having also in view to increase the number of their followers, had recourse to unusually severe and rigid self-inflictions, as well as to the more ordinary course of discipline. The principal theatre of these exhibitions was to be found in the caverns of Fulehpoor.

“Dismal and revolting, in truth, was the spectacle which these gloomy vaults presented, filled as they were with ghastly forms, motionless and voiceless as statues, in every imaginable posture of painful self-infliction and severity of penance.

“Like the pre-adamite monarchs in the enchanted hall of Eblis, who chained immovably in ceaseless torture are not even permitted the relief of fellowship in suffering, did these grim spectres sit from hour to hour, and day to day, as if unconscious of each other’s existence. Not an eyelid was seen to wink over the strained eye-ball, nor did a hand rise to brush away the noisome vermin, that crawled over the marble face. It was a sight to sink the lightest heart; and mine, I do confess, was thoroughly disgusted. Not even the coveted joys of perfect knowledge, and all the ineffable delights of the *Wassalut*, or union with the divine essence, or even the *Wahadut*, or complete identification with the Creator could have reconciled me to so hideous an ordeal.

“Nor did my Peer himself regard the scene with greater approbation. ‘Behold my son,’ he said, ‘the lamentable effects of ignorance and superstition, and the difference between their dictates and those of reason and virtue. It is true, that we are weak and sinful creatures, possessing souls indeed, pure emanations from the Eternal, but clogged by the filthy clay of our earthly tabernacle, so that they cannot soar to enjoy communion with their kindred source; it is true that it is our duty, by self-control, by abstinence and prayer, to purge this dross away, and fit our spirits for their final resting place. But the beneficent Creator requires not such sacrifices from his creatures. He has vouchsafed to them many blessings, which they are bound to enjoy in moderation, it is true, but they must neither despise nor reject them; even the dervish may at fitting seasons indulge, so that he loses not sight of his one great end. These infatuated creatures imagine that the more self-suffering they inflict, the more they will please their Maker. There are some who have a seed of knowledge; but it is choked and rendered unfruitful by the weeds of superstition and false doctrine. Here we shall learn nothing: so longer tarrying is useless.’

“All, however, even in this place, were not such gloomy bigots. There were fakeers and

dervishes of all countries and all characters ; and some of them appeared neither abstinent nor self-denying. With these, at times, I consorted, little to my advantage, indeed ; but greatly to my enjoyment and the raising of my spirits, which were sadly depressed in this den of torture. Here, for the first time did I meet the person, whom you have since known by the appellation of Noor Shah. He was then a youth, more captivated by the apparent liberty of a dervishes life, than resolute in pursuit of its true objects, yet not without a tinge of enthusiasm. But this served rather to mislead, than to direct his mind to good, and it thus became the sport of every new and plausible doctrine, which he chanced to hear.

“ Arrived among the Roushuneah, his imagination became inflamed by what he saw, and he would have enlisted himself among them, had not the probationary exercises at this time practised by them been too severe a trial for his zeal. It was while struggling with this uncertainty, that I first found him, and after pointing out, as well as I was able, the folly and inconsistency of their conduct, I persuaded him to become a convert to the milder doctrines of my own *Peer*, who at my desire, received him as a new *Mooreed*, and permitted him to join our company.

“This defection was exceedingly mortifying to these people, who at the time in question, were peculiarly sensitive in such matters, and who had already imbibed a jealousy of my master, from his disagreement with them in opinion upon many of their principles; a dissent, which he sought not to disguise. Thus we readily discovered, that the sooner we should take our departure, the better it would be for all parties; and our resolution to do so, was quickened by the result of a formal discussion, on the subject of their doctrines, into which the Sheikh was drawn by one of their first Khaleefehs.

“Among the peculiar tenets of their faith, was one in particular, which inculcated, in the strongest terms, the duty of implicit obedience to the *Peer*, or religious instructor. After premising that the commands of such instructors, who having gone through the prescribed probations were considered equal to, or rather identical with God himself, should have all the force of commands from the Almighty it went on to declare, that all who shall refuse to receive and obey the precepts of such Peers, are to be regarded as brutes, whom it is lawful, nay meritorious to destroy, or as men dead, whose property belongs of right to true believers, and may therefore, be by them lawfully appropriated. The

same principle was carried out further in another of their tenets, which declared, that when perfect knowledge, in the mystic sense of the law, had been attained through attention to the instructions of a Peer, and combined with religious discipline, the adept became thus, as it were, above the law, the external forms of which, in such cases, ceased to be binding, and required no longer to be observed.

“ To these positions, my master could by no means assent, and being pressed to give his opinion on the subject, he declared that the idea of forcing the human mind into any given system of faith, against its feelings and convictions, was diametrically opposed to the dictates of reason and the principles of eternal truth itself ; that to search for truth was the duty of all intelligent beings ; but that hampered by such intellectual fetters, the mental faculties could have no due play and must succumb to the yoke of bigotry and error. As for the proposition, that all, who rejected this system of constraint, were to be held as virtually out-laws, objects of lawful rapine and murder, it was too monstrous to be entertained for a moment, being utterly at variance with the principles of eternal justice. The law of right and wrong is co-existant and identical with eternal truth, that is with the deity himself, and consequently not only binding upon,

but inseparable from beings, whose souls are but emanations from that deity.

“ Such was the nature of the Sheikh’s argument. The Khaleefeh adhered to the fundamental maxim of the sect, that Peers being true manifestations of the divinity, or rather the divinity himself, must be obeyed as God ; and that the only test of holiness and virtue in man is the strictness of their obedience to their Peer. So that while disobedience to a Peer is the greatest sin, implicit obedience is the greatest virtue of which man is capable. There being no argument in all this, which was no more than a begging of the whole question at issue, the discussion terminated, and the disputants separated in mutual displeasure ; which, on the part of the Roushuneah Peer, was aggravated by jealousy into determined hatred, while the natural benevolence of the Sheikh prevented his entertaining a more bitter feeling than that of disgust, mingled with somewhat of indignation, at a doctrine so opposite to his own more liberal principles.

“ The day of our departure was fixed at length, and our faces were turned homeward—if the dervish can be said to have a home ; when our journey was stopped by a fatal occurrence, which threw me once more upon the world, and led to a change in all my habits of life. During the whole of our travels, my

master had, at all times, afforded the aid of his medical skill, to those who required it; and among the ignorant Affghans, it had been the more frequently put in requisition, as such assistance came rarely within their reach. Our lengthened stay at Fatehpore afforded time for his fame to spread, and many from the neighbourhood flocked in to avail themselves of his aid. Among the rest an old Reish Suf-feed, the chief of a village, and of a small subdivision of a tribe, requested some medicine for his wife, who was described as having been long a sufferer under a painful complaint. The Sheikh somewhat unwillingly complied, declaring that as he could not see the patient, his prescription must be, in some degree, given at random; and along with the medicine he cautioned the husband to attend particularly to the directions which accompanied it, more especially to beware of administering larger doses than those prescribed.

“It was written, however, doubtless, in the woman’s destiny that she should not recover, for in spite of, or more probably in consequence of the very remedies employed, as we learned that she had taken triple or quadruple the proper quantity in order to effect a cure, she died. There would probably have been no notice taken about the matter, had it not come to the ears of the Roushuneah, who stimulated by jea-

lousy, took it up, and persuaded the man that the Sheikh had murdered his wife. The tongue of the slanderers is the most deadly of all swords, and so in this case it proved.

“As the good Sheikh, attended only by myself, was proceeding, on the evening before our departure, to a garden, at a short distance from our *munzil*, he was overtaken by a furious crowd headed by the widower, who assailed him with the foulest abuse. On his calmly denying the absurd charge brought against him, and upbraiding his accuser with the ingratitude of so rude a return for his exertions to save the invalid, the whole crowd excited by several of the Roushuneah, who were scattered amongst them, set upon the good old man, with clubs and stones, and soon put an end to his life.

“Yet even in these terrible moments, the calm, collected, and benevolent demeanour of their victim produced a powerful effect upon his murderers. Endeavouring to assist and protect him, I came in for a good share of rough usage, but was at his side when he fell. ‘Let me alone,’ said he, ‘and save yourself. The shell only is broken; the pearl escapes,’ added he, smiling; ‘the end is attained sooner than I hoped for;’ and, breaking out into some mystic verses expressive of rapture at the near fulfilment of all his most blissful anticipations, he closed his eyes to open them no more.

“ It was a sight that disarmed even his rude and fierce assailants. Then rage seemed to vanish with the prostration of its object, and they gazed on each other with looks of doubt and shame. The aspect of the Sheikh’s grey hairs clotted with the blood of his wounds ; the very absence of any resistance to their violence, startled them ; and the sin of murdering a holy man, a stranger too, whose person should have been sacred, and thus bringing his blood upon their own heads, shocked even men who held human life in general at but little value. From an object of anger and punishment, the dead man rose into a saint ; and the body was taken reverently up and interred in the garden near which he had been put to death, to receive the honours of canonization.”

CHAPTER IX.

STORY OF ALLEE CONTINUED.

“STUNNED with the blows I had received, and with the unexpected horror of the scene, I was left unnoticed where I had fallen, until found by Noor Shah, who came up after the catastrophe, and helped me to my munzil. There, in the course of a few days, I recovered so far as to be able to prosecute my journey, and in the meantime became more intimate than before with several young fakeers, for dervishes such reprobates could not be called, whose purpose was to travel westward. These were of the class I have already alluded to, men who used their garb as a cloak for licentiousness and excess, and regarded nothing but the pleasure of the passing hour, without any regard to the means by which that enjoyment was attained.

“In our subsequent long and checquered journey, the daily intercourse with comrades of such habits and conduct produced a powerful

and mischievous effect upon the mind of one who, like myself, still young and inexperienced, had for some time past been held under strict moral control; a control which, though voluntarily submitted to and sweetened by feelings of strong affection and esteem, was far from congenial in itself to a youth of my free, roving disposition, and early education. I had, in fact, enjoyed the advantages of good example and precept for too short a time to render me proof against the voice of pleasure or the scorner's laugh. The lessons and excellent admonitions of the good Sheikh, though they remained fixed in my memory, ceased to rule my conduct; and, while aware of what was right, I could not refrain from doing what was wrong.

“The longer I remained in this society of debauchees, the more familiar, of course, did I become with excess and with crime. We roved about at will, a band too strong to fear the encounter of ordinary travellers or common foes. The former we often plundered, the latter we quelled or forced to fly; and when we met a force too powerful for us to resist, we then became the peaceful dervishes, who, having nothing to lose, were the object of no plundering attack, and who greeted with the salute of peace and amity alike the Toorkoman robber, the Belooche banditti, and the licensed plunderers of the Kuzzilbash soldiery.

“ In this way did we once more traverse Khorasan, and having sojourned for awhile at the shrine of that celebrated saint, Sheikh Ahmed-e-Jâmi, we could not refrain from the dangerous experiment of a visit to the holy city of Meshed ; dangerous, I say ; for though, perhaps, containing within its walls as many heretical Sooffees as orthodox Mussulmauns, the Moollahs and Mooshteheds, who ruled there with absolute sway, were bitter enemies to all free thinkers, and could have no greater refreshment to their souls than the occasional stoning of a Sooffee. Yet these Moollahs occasionally paid for their amusement, for the Sooffees and dervishes, true or false, who, with their adherents, formed a strong body, would sometimes rebel, and pay back a share of the severity which they met from the hands of the priesthood.

“ Among the most furious of these orthodox mules was one Moollah Seyd Allee, a real *Yaboo*, a relative of Meerza Mahomed Bauklun, the well-known Sheikh-ul-Islam at Ispahan, and who held a post of some trust and great emolument connected with the shrine of Imaum Reza. This person having observed a dervish of Kashmere, who had already made himself somewhat too remarkable by the freedom both of his actions and opinions, passing the august gate of the mosque in the *sahn*, or

square, with a contemptuous gesture, instead of the proper respectful salute and pious benedictions on the saint there interred, raised a hue and cry; and, following him beyond the sacred precincts of the sanctuary, he beset the unfortunate man with a number of the servants of the shrine. Perhaps, however, these might have stopped short of extremities, and the dervish might have been let off with a sound beating, had not the noise attracted the attention of a large party of pilgrims just arrived, brimful of zeal to perform their adorations at the shrine. These, hearing of the cause, and learning that the object of persecution was one who had sought to desecrate the very shrine at which they came to worship, were roused to holy wrath, and rushing, armed with stones, on the unlucky culprit, who might otherwise have escaped; and, cutting off his retreat, soon brought him to the ground, and, before they desisted, reduced him to a bloody and shapeless mass.

“ In this atrocious proceeding they were encouraged by the Moollah, who, when the deed was consummated, pronounced it to be one particularly grateful to the holy Imaum, and which entitled the perpetrators to peculiar privileges at his shrine. But it was a deed neither unremarked nor unremembered by the fraternity to whom the victim belonged, nor did it pass wholly unavenged.

“ Had the police of Meshed been on the alert that evening, they might have remarked no small stir, from the *Kutulgáh* and the burying-ground of the *Merhawah*, to the tomb of Khojah Rebbie and the Green Goombuz, the usual abodes of the wandering dervishes and calunders. The Moollah, it appears, had a custom of leaving his own house, which, according to report, was occasionally made too hot for him by certain of its inmates, and repairing, with one or two attendants at most, about two or three hours after midnight, to the Hummaum of the *Paeen-pah*, where he passed his time in greater peace and quietness, if not, as some alleged, more creditably than he could do at home, until the hour of morning prayers.

“ How it happened was at first a mystery ; but on the morrow after the event I have related, the Moollah was found almost dead, immersed up to the waist in the filthiest spot of the Meheleh ; and it was found, at the same time, that the railing encircling the shrine, particularly where the pilgrims were in the habit of evincing their devotion by kissing and rubbing their beards upon it, was besmeared with the vilest ordure ; the Moollah’s turban, equally defiled, was likewise seen suspended from one of the rails. This discovery was said to have been made in the most unpleasant manner by some

of the very devout, who had repaired thither early to enjoy the consolation of a kiss at the holy place, before the arrival of their less zealous brethren.

“ The Moollah, who on being carried home had been subjected to a purification, a process which gave employment to several Sac-cas* for an hour or two, wore fastened by a cord, round his neck a piece of parchment, on which were written these words, ‘ The reward of orthodox zeal, from Dervish Rou-shun-ul-Hâk, of Kashmere, to Moollah Seyed Allee Cashânee.’

“ All Meshed rang with the event ; but little information regarding it was to be extracted from the Moollah, who, stupified with shame and ill usage, seemed more inclined to shun inquiry than to seek revenge. The orthodox flew buzzing about in a ferment, like angry bees ; but whether it was that the Moollah was no general favourite, or that men shrunk from embroiling themselves with secret, and, as it appeared, not impotent enemies, it is certain that no active measures were adopted against any one. The dervishes kept quiet, and matters gradually lapsed into their usual tranquillity ; but, from that day forward, for a long time, none of the fraternity were either attacked or persecuted, as had formerly been the case.

* Water carriers.

“ It was this affair which first made me acquainted with the author of your misfortunes. That person, then, a youth like myself, and, as you are aware, the son of Meerza Mahomed Baukher Mujiloossee, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, though now known as Meerza Jemalu-Deen, was originally named Mehdee Koolee, and remarkable as a youth of the most profligate habits and vicious disposition. His father who had set his heart on seeing the young man rise in the priesthood, disappointed at a mode of conduct which threatened to mar all these expectations, after witnessing the commission of many grave offences, and ineffectually resorting to every mode of punishment within his power, resolved, as a last hope to send him to the holy city of Meshed itself, where he trusted that the example of so many pious and religious persons, and, above all, a sight of the many valuable benefices and rich emoluments bestowed upon those who regulated their conduct by orthodox rules, might work a change on the mind and behaviour of his libertine son; or, if such were not the case, where his excesses might be less in view of the scene of his future fortunes, until he should, at least, acquire sense enough to throw a disguise over his vicious propensities.

“ He was accordingly sent to be placed in the Medressa Meerza Jaffier, and principally

under the care of this very Moollah Seyed Allee, who was his maternal relative. The result you may imagine. In a city like Mushed, where, in spite of its holy character, there is far more profligacy than piety, a youth, who had figured like Mehdee Koolee at the capital as a notorious libertine, was not likely to reform. He rushed into all possible excesses, defying every attempt of his relative to check his wild career, until, at length, the latter, for the sake of his own character, was obliged to cast him off and refuse all further intercourse or connexion with one whose society had become discreditable. This abandonment, though caused by his own evil conduct, Mehdee could not forgive. The countenance of the Moollah had, at times, been of use to him, and might be so again, and the young man resolved to make him repent of withdrawing it so publicly.

“ Among his other sins there was one which, in the Moollah’s eyes, was quite unpardonable. His young relative had become acquainted with, and greatly affected, the society of dervishes, calunders and religious mendicants in general, with whom he loved to spend his time and means, rather than among the pious and venerable of the colleges, or the priesthood whom he met at the *Mujlis* of his relative, or among those to whose houses he enjoyed admittance.

Nor did the Moollah know the worst ; for it was not even with the worthiest of that abused order of men, but with the most profligate that he consorted. Their reckless, unfettered mode of life, free conversation, and store of wit and anecdote, not less than the unbridled licence of their conduct, and the unprincipled selfishness with which they followed out their own schemes of pleasure regardless of their effect on others, were just suited to his fancy ; and he gloried in showing how far he could surpass, rather than fall short of the worst of them, in their most daring exploits.

“ But debauchery, however low, is still costly, and means are required to purchase even the lowest pleasures. Those of the future priest were small, and soon exhausted, and the question was, how to recruit them. His credit was soon at an end ; but resolute to obtain funds, he resorted to the last expedient of the needy and profligate, uniting with others equally as poor and unscrupulous as himself in actual theft and robbery ; and thus did he support his own extravagance, and minister to the wants, or impure desires, of his companions.

“ It was during this course of vice and folly, that the occurrence I have related, took place. The dervish who suffered, was one, and not the worst of the set with whom Mehdee Koolee associated. Mehdee Koolee was one of the

most active in avenging his death. In fact, it was no fault of his that the full penalty of blood was not exacted from his relative; but others, more prudent, interfered, remarking, that though the infliction of shame and disgrace on an unpopular character might excite but little sympathy, the case would be widely different were it pushed to such an extremity; for then the matter must be taken up by the body of the priesthood, and, if they were supported, as doubtless they would be, by the popular voice, the result might be disastrous to the dervishes, and a longer sojourn in Meshed would become, for a time at least, impossible. These considerations alone, saved the Moollah's life.

“ I seek not to disguise or deny that I was one of those concerned in the punishment of Moollah Seyed Allee; and thus, as I have stated, commenced my acquaintance with Mehdee Koolee. Far from a rigid moralist myself, and equally devoted to the pleasures and excitements of life, I was delighted with the frank and jovial manners of my new friend; and being ignorant of his history, and having, in truth, no idea of setting up for a judge of his conduct, was not, at first, by any means shocked at his profligacy. I only viewed in him a comrade, the first to devise and the readiest to carry into practice all possible schemes for the gratification of the band to which he had united

himself. In fact, the lessons of morality and good feeling which I had received from my old master, and which I may venture to assert, had exercised a very powerful effect upon my heart and conduct while he lived, had now begun to fade from my memory, and I was daily becoming more unscrupulous and unprincipled.

“I had now fairly fallen into a set who practised every trick, and shift, and deception, which is by many unjustly imputed to the order of dervishes at large, as to a crew of impudent rogues and impostors. Such indeed were my present companions ; and though there were among them individuals of superior intellect and much hard earned experience in the world, they, for the most part, turned it to no purposes, save those of knavery and deceit. Still, naturally of an inquiring, and occasionally of a contemplative turn of mind, even from these I imbibed much that, if well applied, might have been of advantage to me. Like the bee, I could suck honey from the vilest flowers ; but, unlike that wise insect, I did not always turn it to the best use.

“My new comrade, on the other hand, so far from making use of the opportunities which a strange and various life threw in his way, appeared resolved to shut his eyes to all improvement and instruction. Hating the very

thought of the profession chosen for him, probably from some indistinct idea of the constraint it would impose upon his vicious habits, and including in his detestation the religion of which he was selected to be a minister, he eagerly turned to what he deemed its direct antagonist and embraced the opinions and doctrines of Sooffeeism, without comprehending or even examining their nature, merely because they were, as he believed, opposed to the tenets and dogmas of Islam.

“In fact, herding, as he did, with only the lowest of the order, themselves most superficially informed in the abstruse philosophy of true Sooffeeism, it was impossible he could become instructed on so deep a subject or understand much of the truth; and though subsequently his powerful, though ill-regulated mind did search more deeply into the spirit of the doctrines which formerly he had only known in the letter, he was unqualified to understand the full harmony of a system, of which the object is truth, and which speaks to the heart with a force exactly proportioned to the virtue and benevolence it finds there.

“Pursuing our wild career, until Meshed became weary of us, and we of Meshed, we departed, holding still westward, visiting the shrine of Sheikh Bayazeed, of Bostam, and that of Shah Abdul-Azeem, near the ruins of Rhé and the town of Tehran, where we re-

mained for some time practising our usual feats of hypocrisy and deceit. From thence we proceeded to Koom, a city celebrated for its numerous shrines and places of pilgrimage, and above all for the mausoleum of Fatimah, the sister of Imaum Reza. That persons of our character and order should constantly flock to, and abound in, the very strongholds and chief abodes of orthodoxy, trusting themselves amongst the people who, of all others, thirst for their destruction, and persecute them with the greatest bitterness, may no doubt appear strangely inconsistent. But the truth is, that such places are also the great resort of the superstitious and the ignorant, who are seldom qualified to discriminate between true and false religion, between fictitious and real piety, between knowledge and pretension; these are persons by whom the names of dervish and saint are regarded as synonymous, and among whom, therefore, religious adventurers are sure of making their best harvest. Thus it was at Koom, where shrines and Imaunzadehs are more plentiful than shops and houses, and priests and moollahs exceed in number all the rest of the inhabitants, except the crowds of pilgrims that flock to the innumerable *Durgahs*.* These pilgrims were our sources of supply, and bravely did we

* Shrines.

drain the purses they had made up for their pious journey.

“But events of a graver character awaited us at this place. It so happened that Meerza Cossim Allee, brother of the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Ispahan, and consequently uncle to my comrade Mehdee Koolee, had lately been appointed *Mootwullee** of the shrine of Fatimah, a circumstance of which the latter was ignorant, or probably he might have avoided the place. He was a man of sincere piety and goodness—in fact the only worthy member of his family; and though he had resided but a short time at Koom, even in that nest of knaves and hypocrites he had rendered himself acceptable and respected.

“Aware of the advantage of a prepossession in our favour, we no sooner arrived in the city than professing the greatest zeal and reverence for its principal saint and shrine, we boldly repaired thither, and took up our abode in some of the cells in the court of the holy place itself. For a few days our behaviour was so exemplary, that the Khadums professed themselves edified by our devotion. But soon the evil nature broke forth, and certain irregularities, both at home and abroad, attracted so much displeasure, that at length we were all

* Superintendent.

unexpectedly summoned to the presence of the Mootwullee.

“Now whether that functionary had received any secret information, or whether, as was said, an old and keen-eyed domestic did actually recognise my companion under his disguise as a fakeer, I cannot say ; but certain it is that he was known to his uncle, who deeply shocked at the dissoluteness of one, from whom far other things had been expected, upbraided him severely with his crimes, and threatened, unless a reform should instantly be commenced, to send him under constraint to his father at Is-pahan. Stung to the quick by the severity of this reproof, which, however well merited, the young man was too arrogant to endure with patience, and too malignant to forgive, he quitted his uncle’s presence in deep wrath ; and so far from salutary was its effect, that he appeared resolved to rush more recklessly than ever into debauchery. Only a day or two afterwards, he, in company with some of his worst companions, discovered and pillaged a store of wine belonging to an Armenian who (doubtless for sufficient reasons) had been permitted to reside within the sacred walls, when they all got intoxicated, and committed so many scandalous excesses, that the Khadums, calling in assistance, secured several of the leaders, among the rest, Mehdee Koolee, and carried them off to

the Mootwullee, by whose directions they were lodged in prison until further orders.

“The bad passions of the young man were by no means soothed by this adventure, and terrible were the oaths of vengeance which he swore against his mild and worthy uncle, who, as it appeared, was not even aware of his nephew’s being among the culprits. Next day, however, the truth came out, when the Moosh-teheds, or high priests of the place, the leading Moollahs of the principal shrines and mosques, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and Mohtesib, or chief of the police, were assembled together at the house of the Mootwullee, to sit in judgment on the criminals. Then did the unfortunate Meerza Cossim Allee witness the exposure of his unworthy nephew before the conclave, clad in his dervish garb; nor had he presence of mind enough to conceal the fact, for he incontinently broke out into lamentations, and bemoaned in bitter words the dust that had fallen upon his head through the misconduct of so determined a reprobate.

“The assembly sympathized in the distress of one of their own body; and well was it for the guilty that such was the case; for as it was but too clear that the nephew of the Mootwullee was himself the principal culprit they could scarcely award to the others a heavier punishment than they awarded to him. Thus they

were dismissed with a severe admonition, which was accompanied by a private hint that the sooner all concerned should disappear from the city the better.

“As for the principal culprit, to him was given the choice of abjuring his disreputable friends and his errors together, and commencing a new life under his uncle’s roof, or of being sent a prisoner to his father at Ispahan. It was an alternative which admitted of no hesitation. To take up his abode for a short time with his uncle involved but a temporary sacrifice, and a slight exercise of his familiar art, hypocrisy ; so he assumed a contrite aspect, went to the Hummaun, and issued forth, in outward guise at least, a respectable aspirant for the order of the priesthood.

“To myself, however, and to others also, he betrayed the deep and incurable hatred, which the course taken by his good uncle had created in his heart ; and, wild and inconsiderate as I then was, so bitter and unreasonable an animosity shocked and startled me. It was the first trait that awakened me fully to the heartless character of my associate. I reasoned with him on the subject, and endeavoured to show him that, however painful to his feelings the late exposure had been, the old man could, under the circumstances, have pursued no other course. But all my eloquence was vain. His

brow never unbent, any more than his heart, and hell itself was not darker than his look, as he replied, ‘Ay, *you* have escaped; you can speak at your ease; but the wretch who has felt the sticks can only think of his anguish and his revenge; and when I forget either, may the pains of Jehannun seize upon my heart!’

“To the Meerza’s house, however, he went, and appeared to take in a wonderful manner to his new mode of life. Not having been one of the culprits on the recent occasion, nor marked as an evil character myself, I was neither included in their punishment, nor excluded from communication with my companion; and though received with coolness at first, once admitted to the Meerza’s dewankhaneh, I found means to render myself so acceptable, that he expressed himself with kindness to me, and gave me a general invitation to his house. In fact, the old man’s moderation and kindly qualities had greatly engaged my feelings in his favour; and the more so, as I felt indignant at the unmerited hatred which his nephew had conceived against him, and entertained some dread of the consequences. In this manner, however, I became familiar in the Meerza’s house, a privilege of no small value, as it gave me access to a better sort of society than I had for some time kept; and the most disreputable

of my former comrades having left the place, I naturally fell into more respectable company, who, finding that I had travelled much, and observed a great deal, treated me with cordiality, and in time communicated with me confidentially.

“ It was not without some surprise, that I found Mehdee Koolee continuing, outwardly at least, so quiet and peaceable an inhabitant of his uncle’s house. Knowing him as I did, I could not but doubt the sincerity of his apparent conversion ; but after a few weeks’ space, during which nothing remarkable occurred, a proposition being made to me to visit Yezd and certain other places in that quarter, I quitted Koom, to which I did not return till after the lapse of some three months. To my surprise, I found my former comrade still resident in his uncle’s house, and, as far as appearances went, steady and sober in conduct.”

CHAPTER X.

STORY OF ALLEE CONCLUDED.

“ ONE night, soon after my return, while sitting alone in my munzil, reflecting on the many singular turns in my life, and the strange things I had seen, my ear caught a low sound like a ‘ Hem!’ uttered in a woman’s voice, close to the entrance of my cell, and in another moment the purdeh that hung before it being pushed aside, by the light of a small iron lamp which burned in the cell, I saw a figure enter, enveloped in a long dark garment. Taken as I was by surprise, and musing on many a wild fancy, I could not immediately recollect myself, and half imagined that the thing before me was some being of other than human mould, such as I had heard of, or such as had mingled in my dreams by day as well as night. But, on observing that I was alone, the figure, partly throwing aside her mantle, and making a signal of silence, disclosed the checquered veil of a woman, who, whispering the words, ‘ As you

hope for happiness, and would prevent evil, follow me,' turned and left the cell. Such adventures being far from uncommon to the fraternity of saints and religious mendicants, I concluded that she was some fair one desirous of a secret interview; so, catching up my staff and cloak, without further inquiry I followed the mysterious messenger.

"Keeping her in view, I remarked that the road she took led towards the Meerza's house, and was not a little surprised at finding her halt, and await me at the end of a low shed, which in the day-time served as a stall for a seller of melons and other fruit. At this time, however, it was otherwise engaged; for a piece of matting being pushed aside, there appeared a small and mean apartment, at one end of which, upon a slip of carpet, sat a veiled female.

"Approaching her with some common-place compliment, I besought of her that the veil, which like night shrouded her world of charms, might be removed, and I attempted to aid her in uncovering; but, holding fast her veil with one hand, with the other she beckoned me to be seated; and, on my still attempting to employ some gentle force, she exclaimed, 'Hold! you mistake; if you possess one spark of honesty or humanity refrain, and listen to what I have to say!'

“ Struck with the earnest sincerity of her manner, I desisted; and on her requesting me to be seated, I took a place near her upon the carpet.

“ ‘ You are a friend of Meerza Cossim Allee ?’ said she.

“ ‘ I am !’ I replied.

“ ‘ I know it,’ she said, ‘ for I have seen you often in his company, and have heard him speak of you with regard. You are also a friend of Aga Mehdee Koolee ?’ added she, inquiringly.

“ I hesitated.

“ ‘ I know him well,’ said I, at length.

“ ‘ I understand,’ replied she; ‘ you could not well be the *friend* of both. Now give ear. I am one of the Meerza’s household, a niece of his wife, and was brought up at his feet—in his arms, which were to me as those of a father. I was his favourite handmaid, and was happy, oh, how happy! and innocent, till of late—till—till that same Mehdee Khoolee came to dwell amongst us. Villain that he is! and, alas! wretch that I am! As nephew of the Meerza, he lived in his house like a child of the family, and to him there was neither veil nor purdeh. He soon saw me, and I became the object of his vicious desires. Alas! you know that he can please, that he can fascinate. What need then for me to say how I resisted,

or how he at length prevailed? I loved him fondly; I would have died for him. How then could I have fancied that he was but plotting my ruin?

“ ‘ In a plain and simple family such as ours, suspicion was not readily awakened. Our intimacy continued unsuspected, till I at last became sensible of its effects; and then only did the consequences of my folly flash upon my soul. With shame and confusion did I impart to my betrayer the secret which could not long be hid; and the first dreadful suspicion of his evil designs and treachery arose in my soul from remarking the gleam of malignant joy which burst from his piercing eye, on hearing my confession.

“ ‘ Thanks be to Allah!’ muttered he, ‘ the game is now my own.’

“ ‘ In the name of heaven! what mean you?’ demanded I, startled at his words.

“ ‘ No matter, my soul!’ replied he ‘ take care of yourself, and fear not; all will go well!’

“ ‘ Alas! little did I then guess the meaning of those words; but after wondering for awhile, the alarm I had felt at first abated, and matters went on much as before, save that as the time approached when I knew that my own shame must be disclosed, my terror and uneasiness increased. Yet what was to be done?—what could I even propose? My brain became be-

wildered, and my wretchedness was so great as to affect my looks and health, and thus to elicit many kind inquiries from my worthy and beloved relatives.

“ ‘ At length my betrayer dropped the mask, and appeared in his own dark colours. Yet, even he, hardened and unprincipled as he is, felt embarrassed when he came to disclose to me his diabolical intentions. Seizing the opportunity, when I was expressing my own perplexity as to the measures to be taken when the period I anticipated should arrive, he professed a full participation in my uneasiness, and artfully threw in one very plausible suggestion to increase my terror, and display the desperate consequences that would fall on both, should the Meerza his uncle become aware of what had occurred. Observing that I was worked up almost to frenzy by the pictures he presented to me, he next remarked, with the affectation of infinite reluctance, and a gloomy aspect, that the only thing which could relieve us from our difficulties, would be the death of the Meerza ; a contingency not unlikely to happen, as he was old, and far from being blessed with a strong constitution.

“ ‘ He paused, observing my eyes fixed with alarm and horror on his countenance.

“ ‘ Yes,’ he continued, gathering courage as he proceeded, from having broken the ice of his in-

famous purpose, ‘yes ; unless it should please God to take my worthy uncle to the joys of paradise, there is no safety for either of us ; both are on the verge of ruin ; whereas, were the old man once fairly disposed of, nothing would remain between us and perfect safety and enjoyment.’

“ ‘ Remarking my bewilderment, for though I felt the hollowness and heartlessness of his reasoning, I could not yet discover his drift, he proceeded to state more plainly, that the course of nature required to be hastened, and that the Meerza *must not* live to discover our criminal intimacy.

“ ‘ Yes—the man must die,’ said he ; ‘ either he or we must die. Self-preservation not only justifies, but demands the sacrifice of his life. And you, Fâtmeh, must for your own sake, assist in bringing about this indispensable event.’

“ ‘ In short, the wretch at length explained to me not only that my beloved relative was to be murdered, but that his life must be cut short by poison which he was to furnish, and *I* administer ! Thunderstruck at the development of this diabolical plot, I expressed my indignation in very decided terms, but he stopped me short, and declared, with an expression of countenance which can never be forgotten, that remonstrances were useless ; that what he said *must* be

done, and that on my obedience would depend, as I should find, both my honour and my life ; that in short I was his tool, and that he would use me as such !

“Thoroughly disgusted as well as humiliated, my eyes opened, and the love I once felt all turned to hate and fear ; yet, roused by the usage I had sustained to greater spirit than I believed to be within me, I replied in terms of abhorrence and defiance that excited his rage to a frightful pitch. But what availed such expressions of my feelings ? What after all was left me but the knowledge of a dreadful plot against the life of my benefactor, and the horrible conviction that no effort of mine would suffice to avert the danger ? It was while in this state of perturbation that I heard of your arrival, and believing you to be a good man and a friend to the worthy Meerza, I resolved to seek an interview with you, and acquaint you with what had occurred, in the hope that you may contrive some means of saving the innocent from the snares of the wicked.

“See now, I have trusted thee ; and may the malediction of Heaven rest upon thee, if thou shalt betray me, or him who may be endangered by my communication ! I conjure thee, in the name of the Most High and of his holy prophet, and of all the blessed Imauns to attend to my words and entreaties. Thou seest I have not spared

myself, nor cloaked my own shame, but all—nay, my miserable life would I freely sacrifice, to save my venerable protector.’

“Such was the poor’s girl’s story; which, deeply as I had plunged in heedless guilt, revealed to me a degree of heartless wickedness which made me loathe the scoundrel who had been so long my comrade. The motive of his change of conduct and apparent reform were now sufficiently clear; and not less so, the unswerving intensity of his hatred and his fatal purpose towards his uncle. But what was to be done? How were these intentions to be frustrated? I remained silent for a while, rapidly revolving in my mind the circumstances I had just heard.

“Fâtme’h,’ said I at length, ‘you have sought my aid; are you disposed to listen to my counsel?’

“‘Alas!’ replied she, ‘what else can I do? What other purpose could I have in thus applying to you? We are strangers in this place; there is no one else to whom I could turn except to my family, and from them I am debarred by my own imprudence!’

“‘But this,’ said I, ‘must no longer be. Why should you play the game of your unprincipled betrayer, and give him the very hold over you which he has plotted to secure? He expected that if once you were his victim, you must become his tool; but why crown these

vicious hopes with success? Because he has injured you deeply must you remain his humble slave? To what end should you consent to such abasement? The only hope he held out was to free you from exposure to shame; and how was that to be effected? by the commission of a terrible crime—a crime which, praise be to Allah, you have spurned at committing, and which, if perpetrated would but plunge you into deeper wretchedness. Then what remains? Sooner or later your error must become known.

“ ‘ Make a virtue of necessity—confess your fault, and communicate to the Meerza what you have now told me. He will be touched by your candour and contrition; and gratitude for his life thus preserved will mitigate his grief and anger at your misconduct, and insure to you ultimate forgiveness. Hold no further intercourse with the villain who has caused this misery; grant him not even a parting interview, and you will soon be delivered from his persecution. That deliverance I shall take upon me to effect. Now, Fâtmeh, what say you? A mind, which like yours could prompt the present measure, should have strength enough to consent to a further sacrifice of pride to secure a great good.’

“ For a while she replied not, but I could hear the half-suppressed sobs which threatened

to rend her breast, and I felt that the veil, which still concealed her face, hid also many a big tear-drop that ran from her eyes. At length the burst of passion subsided; she arose slowly to her feet, and said while wrapping her *chader* round her in readiness to depart,

“ ‘ You have stated the truth. There *are* no other means. I feel that I shall be the sacrifice, but so it should be. I deserve to suffer, and shall not shrink from it. The Meerza shall hear all; see that you do your part, and banish the traitor from this place, and so may Allah protect you ;’ and with a graceful obeisance she turned and left the place.

“ For a moment I gazed after her, in admiration of her firmness, and wondered how a spirit like hers could have so easily been seduced to folly. But who shall read the heart of woman, or attempt to calculate the power or consequences of passion in the human breast? The females who had guided me now advanced to show me my way from the spot; and as I followed her from the door-way, we were met by a figure in whom I was not a little confounded at recognising the subject of the conversation I had just been holding, my former comrade, Mehdee Koolee. The moon had risen, the night was bright, and the recognition was mutual.

“ ‘ What Allee?’ said he, ‘at your old tricks, I see! There she goes. *Afereen! Moubárik—*

I thought you had abjured the sex and set up for purity and virtue; but I congratulate you on the report being false. Which way do you go? after her; or is the meeting over?

“ ‘ No,’ said I, ‘ I am for my munzil. It is the old story; medicine; the humours, &c., nothing more! God be with you,’ and so we parted for the time.

“ Two days afterwards, when I thought poor Fâtmeh might have made up her mind to ease her conscience, I sought an interview at my own munzil with the Meerza’s nephew; and, after a preface of no great length, informed him of the cause I had to believe that his reform was so far from sincere, and his heart still so rancorōus. I told him that I had discovered his murderous intentions towards his worthy uncle, and had proof of his design to make away with him by poison; and that unless he was prepared for exposure to his relative, he would do well to make a speedy retreat. I added that my eye should be upon his movements, and warned him that he should find it an eye that neither slumbered nor slept.

“ From the moment of my commencing this address, I saw him fix his eye upon my face with a look which deepened gradually into a deadly glare. You know his countenance, and how its handsome features can be smoothed to suit his purpose; but you have never yet seen it

wear the horrid scowl of undisguised hatred, which his black heart can communicate to those pliant lineaments, and which, at this time, was heightened by uncontrollable fury.

“ ‘ Indeed!’ exclaimed he, through his gnashing teeth. ‘ So these are your commands? It is well. Thou art truly an admirable protector, as those who trust to thee shall find. I dispute not thy information; correct, or otherwise, it can have been derived from but one source, and those who furnished it shall have cause to rue their officiousness. As for thee, look to thyself: thy one eye will have work enough in watching its master’s safety.’

“ I returned his wrathful frown with a steady and unquailing look, merely replying, ‘ It is well. The warning is fair on both sides; but be advised, and seek not to cross my path; or it may fare worse with thee than with the adder which sought to bite the file.’

“ We separated, and at this time I saw no more of him. He disappeared from the house, and the good Mootwullee, who had been made aware of his nephew’s purposes, congratulated himself with many a ‘ La-illah-ul-ullah!’ at his providential escape from so diabolical a reprobate. More than ever now did he seek my society, which he regarded as a protection from his violent nephew; and at length I lived far more in his house than at my own munzil.

“ As time went on, the family of the Meerza recovered their tranquillity, which, however, was partially interrupted by the sudden death of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, who was an intimate acquaintance of the Mootwullee; and the circumstances of his death were so suspicious, that they failed not to recall, vividly, to the good man, the danger which he himself had so recently run. Nevertheless, the daily routine of the family was not disturbed. The Mootwullee attended, as usual, to the duties of his office, and the females repaired, in their veils, to the bazaars, or to the baths, or to visit their neighbours and acquaintances. The Hummaum, which they frequented, was at no great distance from the house, and the way to it led through a lane, which being unconnected with any bazaar, was but little used by passengers. It was, however, one of the ways by which I could get from my munzil to the Meerza’s house, and was preferred by me on account of its quiet and loneliness.

“ One evening, when nearly dusk, it so happened that I took this road. Not a soul did I meet on the way; and I passed along without any interruption to my musings, which chiefly referred to the singular and most atrocious character of my late comrade, until within a few paces of the Hummaum, when I was startled by a fearful shriek, and almost imme-

diately saw a man burst from the door into the lane. After a hurried glance the other way, he rushed towards me, when I observed that in his hand he grasped a bloody dagger, and that his clothes were sprinkled thick with spots of blood. Probably he had not observed me, for his head was turned backwards, and he almost ran against me.

“An involuntary exclamation, on my part, caused him to start, and turn his face full upon me, and in my turn I started at recognising in it that of the person who had just been employing my thoughts. The recognition was mutual; for, with a fierce execration, he aimed a blow at me with his bloody weapon, exclaiming, at the same time, ‘Take it, and go to hell!’ Without difficulty I parried the blow, and tried to seize him; but eluding my grasp in his turn, and warding me off with a sweep of his dagger he sprung past me, and a turn in the lane shut him out from my view. All passed like lightning; but the cries from the Hummaum continuing with unremitting violence, instead of following the ruffian, I hurried on to yield what assistance I could to those who seemed so much to require it.

“Stopping at the door of the Hummaum, which being occupied by women, no man could, of course, enter without a breach of propriety, I called out, ‘In the name of Allah what has

happened? Can a man, such as I am, be of use?' Immediately the door was opened, and the Hummaumchee, with a female, cried out, 'If you are a Mussulmaun, for Allah's sake, go for a surgeon; here is a miserable creature of God bleeding to death.'

" 'I know of no surgeon near this place,' replied I, 'but I am a dervish, as you see, and know something of surgery.'

" 'It is Allee, it is Allee,' exclaimed the woman, 'in the name of God, enter. Thou art our master's friend; look at this miserable wretch, and say whether you can do her any good.'

"I now recollected the voice as belonging to one of the Meerza's women, and a thrill of apprehension seized me as I descended into the outer apartment of the bath, where, surrounded by several women, who had hastily thrown on their *chaders*, lay the victim of this murderous attack. By the dim light of a miserable lamp, I could just distinguish, stretched on one of the undressing places, a figure, partly covered with a sheet, which was dyed with blood. The deep sobs which issued, at intervals, from her breast alone, gave token that she still lived, for the limbs were motionless as those of one already dead.

" 'For the sake of Allah! who is it?' asked I of a female, who was pressing a handkerchief upon the poor creature's bosom.

“ Ai Wahi ! Ai Wahi ! ” exclaimed the voice of the Meerza’s wife, “ it is Fâtme ! ”

“ Merciful Allah ! ” cried I, horror-struck at a catastrophe, the cause as well as the perpetration of which I so well knew ; “ but where is she hurt ; perhaps we may yet save her . ”

“ ‘ Alas ! see ! ’ said she, and removing the sheet from the upper part of the body, she gave to view a deep and gaping wound in the breast, from which immediately there gushed forth a tide of crimson blood. A glance was sufficient, and my heart sunk with deep sorrow, at witnessing the fate of so fair and lovely a creature. The women gazed on me in silence, awaiting my opinion and directions. Alas ! both were useless, for even while we gazed, the poor girl’s breast heaved with a convulsive effort ; a torrent of blood gushed from her mouth ; her limbs were agitated for a moment, with a shuddering movement, and then settled into stillness :—she was dead ! I have witnessed death in many shapes, and under every possible circumstances, God knows ; but seldom have I been more deeply moved than by that short painful scene.

“ The consternation of the Meerza, at this atrocious outrage, was excessive. He spoke as if he felt his own doom was sealed. From being cheerful and cordial in his demeanour he became sad and taciturn, as if he brooded over his impending fate ; and after struggling

with his feelings and apprehensions, for a while, he declared that at Koom, he could not and would not remain. This resolution, indeed, he made known only to a few in whom he thought he could place confidence; and he made his preparations for leaving the place in secret. In the meantime every possible search was made for the murderer, but in vain. I discovered, indeed, through my own agents, that he had more than once been seen, previously to, and even on the very day of the murder, in various parts of the city. It was not to be wondered at, that immediately after it he should disappear.

“At length the time of the Meerza’s departure arrived. He resolved to return to Ispahan, where he thought he should be more secure from his remorseless kinsman, and where the society of his friends, and ancient comrades would efface from his recollection the painful scenes of Koom. He made it his request that I should accompany him; and having in reality no other call upon me, from duty or otherwise, at the time, I willingly assented.

“Never did I see a man more exhilarated than the Meerza, on the morning, when all things having been arranged by his Nazir, (the old servant of whom I have already spoken, as the person who recognised his nephew,)

no obstacle presented itself to his leaving the place. For several days previously, he had been restless and uneasy, like a man labouring under some painful load, from which he sought relief in vain. He now mounted his ambling mule with alacrity, as if anxious to secure his safety and deliverance, by rapid movement from the scene of his distress. His departure was not so secret, but that a few of his friends assembled to bid him "Khodah-Hafiz." Yet though he responded with kindness and warmth to their greetings, he could not repress strong symptoms of impatience, even at this short delay.

"Contrary to usual custom, instead of making a short stage to some neighbouring village or garden, the Meerza insisted on proceeding at once to Passangoon, where he arrived in excellent spirits. He believed himself now safe, and thought he had burst the spell, which in binding him to Koom seemed to weigh upon his heart like the doom of death.

"The next day, we halted at the caravanse-
rai, Sin-sin; and as the following march to
Cashân was a long one, the old man retired at
an early hour, in order that we might mount
our horses before daylight on the morrow.
At the evening's meal, he was particularly kind,
and, with his own hand, gave me several choice
morsels from the dishes before him. The cell or

chamber, in which he was to repose, was in a sheltered corner (for the wind was high and cold) and consisted of an outer and an inner compartment. In the former we had dined ; the inner had been swept out and carpeted, for his sleeping place, and the harem occupied the two neighbouring chambers. In the outer, or ante-room of the Meerza's apartment slept two servants, one being the old Nazir, who usually lay across his master's threshold. As for me, I spread my carpet in a cell, on the opposite side of the angle to that which they occupied ; where, after the old man had retired, I withdrew and remained rapt in contemplation for several hours. At length, sleep stole upon me, without my being sensible of it, and from the reveries of wakeful memory, I passed un-awares into the region of dreams.

“ It was scarcely, perhaps, remarkable that the subject which occupied so much of my waking thoughts, should recur to my mind in sleep ; but there was something singularly striking in the dream which now visited me. I thought I was once more travelling with my former master, the Sheikh. We were in all the bustle of the Sahn, or great square at Mushed, in the stream of comers and goers in front of the shrine itself ; and many a face, that had been familiar to me there, flitted to and fro. It was a scene, which should have teemed with

joyful recognitions, yet no joy was there. A gloom hung like a chilling damp on every countenance, and was heavy on my own breast. The scene changed insensibly into a wild succession of images and places, which whirled rapidly through my brain; but the same depressing influence was upon them all. At length it seemed that we were labouring through a dreary wilderness, with naked crumbling rocks on one hand, and the white crust of a salt marsh on the other; and I knew that it was the valley of the *Maleek-ul-Mout*—of the angel of death, which we had so lately passed through on the road from Koom. The Sheikh was still with me, and though his face was sad and gloomy, I felt comfort in his presence. The wind howled drearily, and a storm enveloped us; yet still we pursued our way.

“The thunder roared, and the lightning flashed, and I heard a voice through the din—a voice which thrilled to my very marrow, and which said in hollow and mysterious tones; ‘Ye haste in vain! for both are summoned, but one is taken!’ and I looked at my companion, when, lo! it was the Meerza!

“Again the scene was changed, and we were all at Koom, setting in the Assembly, as it had met there to examine and punish the delinquent fakeers; and the same voice was heard again saying, ‘Where is the criminal?’ It was an-

swered by another which exclaimed in accents of thunder, 'He is here for vengeance!' and a form of gigantic size, which I knew to be the Meerza's nephew, overshadowed the place and appeared to strike the old man, who withered under the blow.

"But again there was a change. I was in the Hummaum, and surrounded by women, and bending over the body of the unfortunate Fâtmeh, when a hand removed the sheet, and behold it was that of the Meerza! Stepping back in horror, I saw that it was the Sheikh who had raised the veil, and again was heard that thrilling voice; 'Faithful guardian,' it said, 'thou whose eye neither closes nor sleeps, awake! awake!'

"And with a start I did awake, and found that the fire, which was burning when last I had seen it, was now extinguished, and the cell, in darkness. For some moments I remained pondering over the vivid images, that had passed through my sleeping mind, so vividly that I could scarce persuade myself they were not realities! but, with reflection, came alarm; they resembled rather a vision than a dream, and I became so uneasy at what seemed so extraordinary a warning, that I resolved to satisfy myself, at least, that all was right before again resigning myself to sleep.

"Accordingly I left my cell and, crossing the

angle, went straight towards the Meerza's apartment. While mounting the terrace, that stretched before the line of cells, methought I heard a movement in that occupied by the Meerza, and I pressed forward to the door. Cautiously removing the screen which hung in front, I found the place faintly illuminated by the rays of a night lamp, which burned in the Meerza's chamber. The separating curtain of the inner apartment had fallen to one side, and permitted the light to enter the antechamber. Across the doorway still lay the servant, buried, as it seemed, in sleep; but from within came the sounds of struggling and smothered groans. Full of my dream I sprang forward, calling on the servant to rise, and see what was the matter; but he stirred not, and, at that moment, a man rushed forth with garments all disordered, who, leaping over the servant's body, made straight for the outer door. I threw myself in his way, and grappling with him unawares, hurled him to the ground. He looked upward, and my eyes met the features of Mehdee Koolee, inflamed with the same satanic glare that was so well imprinted on my memory.

“By this time the other servant was awake; and full of apprehension for the Meerza, I called on him to secure the ruffian, and hurried to the inner chamber. Alas! my worst fears

were verified ! There lay the good old man, senseless, lifeless, his eyes starting from their sockets from the force of the murderer's grasp upon his throat. No blood was to be seen, for none had been shed. He had been despatched by other means than the dagger, for it was evident the victim's breath had been stopped by strangling. It was a horrible sight ; yet, still in hopes that the spark of life might not be utterly extinct, I hurried back to the outer cell to alarm the attendants and procure assistance.

"I found the servant, whom I had left in charge of the prisoner, rising slowly from the ground, where he had been forcibly thrown by the latter, who, upon recovering himself a little from his fall, had shaken off his guard and succeeded in getting away. He was now, of course, not to be seen ; but the servant, who, I found, was the old Nazir that should have slept upon the threshold, but who, on this particular night, had changed places with his comrade, declared to me with trembling and dismay, that the murderer was no other than Aga Mehdee Koolee, and that his surprise and horror at the discovery were so great, that he had lost all power of resistance.

"It was not till now that we remembered the other servant, who continued stretched across the door sill, in ominous stillness ; and when we went to raise him, we found that he,

too, was dead ; a dagger was sticking up to the hilt in his heart. The alarm had now spread, and women and men came pouring into the cell ; but all hope of recovery was vain ; the good old Meerza had departed to the joys of Paradise.

“ I need not dwell upon the horror and consternation, into which the family were plunged by this terrible event. The body of the Meerza was carried back to be interred at Koom, while his family went to Cashân for protection, until they should fix upon their future plans. For myself, the good old man’s death had taken from me the only motive I had for visiting the capital ; so, after having accompanied his body back to Koom, I was once more upon the world. At Koom, however, I fortunately fell into the society of those who, as I before mentioned, had replaced my former less reputable companions.

“ From that time my life has been strange, adventurous, and checquered ; but an account of it would be foreign to my purpose, which was merely to inform you, not only of the circumstances under which I made acquaintance with the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân, but also with those which introduced me to, and identified me with, that fraternity of whom you have lately seen so much. Years passed without another meeting between the

murderer and myself, but not without my receiving hints of *his* existence, in the shape of various attempts upon my *own*; which, though they proved abortive in consequence of my altered mode of life, and the peculiar character of the brotherhood to which I, at that time, belonged, showed that his hatred, at least, remained unabated; and I may mention it as a striking fact, that of those persons who were witnesses to his disgrace, as members of the assembly at Koom, scarcely one survived the twelvemonth; and *all* died suddenly, or under circumstances of strong suspicion.

“It was about six years ago, when my situation and way of life had undergone a further change, and I had become known as ‘Allee Neemroo, the horse-dealer,’ that travelling towards Ispahan with a caravan, and several servants and beasts which I had purchased, we halted at Muxood Beggee. I had just seen the animals dressed and fed, as a party on horseback rode into the yard; on turning to look at the new comers, my eye was instantly arrested by the appearance of him who was the chief. There was no mistaking the countenance of Mehdee Koolee, changed though it was by the lapse of many years; nor was his proud and lofty form less recognisable, though clad in the unpretending garb of a respectable Moollah.

“From the momentary air of surprise, which passed over his features, I suspected that the recognition was not on my side only ; and my conjecture was soon confirmed by the appearance of one of his servants, after his master had made his arrangements for the night, who brought me a complimentary message from that personage, intimating that he believed me to be an old acquaintance, and requesting the pleasure of my company. Little as I was disposed to renew my acquaintance with such a man, it was clearly, as I conceived, against prudence to set him at defiance, or by evincing reluctance to an interview and rejecting a common civility, to allow him to insinuate that fear, or a consciousness of guilt induced me to repel his advances. I, therefore, replied with courtesy, and in a short time did actually repair to his chamber.

“He received me with affected cordiality ; asked repeatedly after my health ; assured me that my place had been long very empty in his heart, and, finally requested to learn what had become of me since we parted ; whence I was, and whither I was going.

“To all this I replied in general terms ; and, after smoking a calleeoon, would have retired ; but he requested me to stay with him a little longer, and finally informing me he had something to say to me in private, proposed making

a *khelwut*, or clearing the room, for the purpose of communicating it. This was not agreeable; yet, surely it was not I, who had cause to shrink from such an interview, and as for treachery, although the risk of such a thing might cross my thoughts, I had for many years been too much in the habit of relying on my own resources, and was too confident in my own powers, to dwell with any alarm on such a contingency. I therefore acquiesced; and the attendants having left the apartment, the Mootwullee's nephew drew near and addressed me as follows:—

“ ‘It is long since we parted, Allee, and we did so under circumstances, which I fear you have not forgotten, though I could wish they were blotted for ever from the memories of both. Tell me, my friend, can it not be so?’

“ ‘What reply can I make to such words?’ said I, ‘the memory is not a garden from which you may pull the weeds and leave the flowers. Yet, where is the man who can say there is nothing I would forget? If you repent of your crimes, and would wash *them* out along with their remembrance, it is well; for repentance is as medicine to the soul, and giveth health to the spirit.’

“ ‘Well, well,’ replied he with some impatience, ‘no doubt I repent. I may have credit for that at least, but others should for-

get. Listen to me, man ; when we parted, it was as enemies ; *I* confess it, and *you* know it ; that is enough. I would be your friend again ; do you consent ?’

“ ‘As for friendship, Mehdee,’ replied I, ‘where would be the use of it to either of us ? Our paths in life are different ; we may never meet again ; and to tell the truth the seldom we meet the better. *I* desire not such friendship.’

“ ‘*Be-Jehannum !*’ muttered he between his teeth. But recollecting himself a little, he continued in a more temperate tone, ‘In the name of God, Allee, understand me ; you don’t imagine I mean the friendship of two beardless boys, or girls in their teens ; I mean that of men, who know the world and the value of reciprocal assistance : but, if we cannot be friends, we need not at least be foes. Iraun is wide enough for us both, so why should we cross each other’s path ? Give ear then, and learn my meaning ; for you know it is not my fashion to throw words away. Since we parted, I have changed my dress, and my habits with it ; I am now a Moollah, as you see, a *fakeer*,* a meek and simple priest, who am regarded as a respectable and pious doctor of the law and of our holy religion. God be praised for all his blessings ! I confess, however, that there

* Meaning here strictly “poor in spirit.”

are some passages in my former life, which accord not well with my present calling, and which, if maliciously represented, might affect the good name which I now enjoy. Many of those, who were privy to the circumstances, have gone to heaven or hell; you, almost alone, remain. All the friendship I ask of you is silence: it will hurt neither, but do good to both; do you consent to observe it?

“It were needless to repeat the whole of our long conversation. In substance it was as follows:—My former comrade, who was now, I found, known by the appellation of Meerza Jemal-u-deen, the *comeliness* of the true faith, had appeared at Ispahan, and in his father’s house, some time after the events at Koom and at Sin-Sin; and, having abjured his errors, and made the *toveh** for his crimes and misdemeanours, those at least known to the public, was received into favour; and after living some time in a respectable and creditable way, so far at least as externals went, became regarded as a Moollah, and through the interest of his father obtained several lucrative offices in the mosques or medressas of Ispahan. The good name he had regained with so much difficulty, he had found by experience it was essential for his own comfort to preserve; and in order to

* Recantation, or abjuration and repentance.

secure its permanence, he had spared neither pains nor blood. Mine he would gladly have also spilt as that of the most dangerous witness, who could be brought against him; but having found me so securely guarded as to defy his best laid plots, the only alternative left him was to conciliate me.

“Having broken the ice, he now talked plainly enough. He admitted my power over his credit and good name; but reminded me, that I also had lived long as an acknowledged Sooffee; that he had cause to believe me still connected with that fraternity, who were then in such bad odour with both the Shah and the priests, that to accuse a man of Sooffeeism was almost tantamount to dooming him to destruction; that he also had much in his power, through his father and the influential Moollahs, as well as through the Shah himself; and that, he, therefore, would propose a mutual forbearance; that I should do nothing to hurt him in public opinion, and that he, on his part, would promise to use no influence against myself or any of my friends, but, on the contrary, would aid us on all occasions when required, in providing for our safety when in danger.

“To these terms I assented; I had reasons for so doing, which the Meerza could not have known, and even though fearing him not, yet knowing the daring, unprincipled character

of the man, I felt myself more independent and secure from thus neutralizing a hostility so restless and persevering as his had proved to be.

“Small reliance, however, should I have placed on his observance of such a compact, had not circumstances occurred that even while augmenting the power I held over him, tended rather to give the Meerza an interest in my life, than to increase his desire for my death.

But there was one fact, which, till now, I have never divulged to any one, above all not to him; a fact which places him at my mercy. This fact is the existence of the servant who saw him rushing from the Meerza's chamber on the night of his murder; from whose hands he on that occasion made his escape. This man, after recovering from his wounds, conscious that his life was unsafe in Irâk, took refuge at the shrine of Ardebeel, in Azerbijan, where he still remains; and could, if required, be produced to corroborate the statement I may at any time make against him.

“It is to the consciousness of the power I possess, though ignorant of its full extent, and which I have converted to more active and hazardous expedients, that you owe your present safety; and though I should not choose to trust to its influence alone, as a protection against secret practices, you may rest satisfied, that in my hands you are secure; and

out of them you do not pass until the day of trial is over.

“ You have now learned the origin, and in some measure, the progress of my connexion with that powerful fraternity whose agency I have enlisted to protect you. With the history of my own influence over them I cannot, now at least, make you acquainted. I have explained to you that among dervishes there are orders and degrees. There are, in like manner, signs and tokens, and modes of communication, by which information is conveyed, and individuals made known to each other; and there are objects and purposes not altogether confined to religious matters, but which all are bound to promote and seek the attainment of. But these you could not now comprehend any more than you can comprehend the measure of this mysterious power, the extent of its means, or the energy and zeal of those with whom it rests to direct it. Against it is arrayed all the strength of the government and the priesthood; but it is arrayed in vain. They may pour their petty malice on an unlucky dervish or fakeer; they may sacrifice a few individuals, and thunder forth empty menaces; but they cannot crush a power which pervades all Asia, from Roum to Hindostan; and which, animating with unconquerable zeal the souls of myriads, will sweep away the feeble barriers of despotism and bigotry, and advance

with resistless force to the mighty objects of its existence. As for the priests, their reign is near its close ; and let the weak monarch, who has hitherto preferred the hollow support of ignorance and bigotry to the solid aids of wisdom, experience, and intelligence, beware lest the tottering fabric of their sway involve himself in their certain ruin !”

Here Allee, whose energy, during the latter part of this address to his young companion, had been greatly at variance with his ordinary sedate and tranquil demeanour, ceased to speak ; and Hoosseïn contemplated with wonder the fire which burned in his deep seated eye, and the grandeur which seemed to dilate his usually unpretending person. After a pause of some minutes, he again resumed the discourse, which the young man made no attempt to interrupt.

“ I have told you that you are safe under my eye and protection ; but I have not yet told you all. It is necessary that you should know precisely the ground on which we stand. Notwithstanding the firman of pardon obtained by you from the Shah, it appears that your enemy has been at work, and successfully too ; for he has obtained a special order to seize your person, and put you to death, for crimes alleged against you ; of which contempt of the royal commands, and an attempt on the life of the

Sheikh-ul Islam, are among the number. Nay, listen and hear all. This order has been wrung from the Shah by the Moollahs, who find it their interest to support the Sheikh, notwithstanding his known evil character, on account of the ability which he has displayed in maintaining the influence of their order, and in repressing Sooffeeism.

“ Had it not been for this royal ruckum, I should at once have carried you off, and there would have been an end of the matter. But our antagonist having gained so great an advantage, we must proceed with increased caution. To Ispahan you now must go, and there abide your trial. We must not choose such an occasion for resisting the Shah’s firman. Such contumacy might give our enemies a fatal hold upon us; and they could, besides, enlist the civil and military authorities upon their side, and the issue of such a contest would at best be doubtful. Thus the firman must be obeyed; but you shall proceed to the capital under my charge alone, nor shall you quit it until transferred to the hands of the Shah’s officers, who, for their own sakes, will take care of you.”

“ But,” said Hoossein, breaking silence, at last, “ if the influence exerted with the Shah has been so powerful as to obtain this order of arrest, in spite of his own sense of justice, and

the former firman of pardon, how am I to hope for a fair trial and a fortunate issue, under such circumstances? No doubt the Moollahs, having got me into their power, will comply with the Sheikh-ul-Islam's desires, and have me put to death."

"Allah forbid, my son," replied Allee, "fear not that! A host of friends shall watch over thee, and secure thy safety; they can penetrate the royal prisons, ay, or the royal harem, were that necessary to your safety. Should the imbecile Shah be unable to confirm his first decree of free and full forgiveness, we must, in that case, adopt our own means for effecting the purpose which he cannot. Of that rest satisfied; not a hair of your head shall be touched, not a limb be harmed. You have seen cause to confide in the power of those who have sworn to save you; and to sum up all, the mode we have fixed upon is the only sure and certain one of attaining our ends. Take courage! In spite of Shah, Priest, and Moollah, we shall succeed. Ispahan is our strong-hold, and there we must prevail."

Hoossein paused in thought; the situation was a singular one, nor was the prospect altogether clear before him. With life and freedom, as it might seem within his grasp, to be thus forced to place himself in the hands of his enemies, with nought to trust to but a power,

the influence of which might not, at the very moment of need, avail, it appeared a dangerous game. Yet where was the remedy? Had he not, too, already experienced the extraordinary vigilance and activity of this very power? Why then should doubt harass him? Why should he not at once resign himself to what appeared inevitable, and lay hold upon the means which had already been effectual to his preservation? While these thoughts passed through his mind, he remembered the ring that had been given to him by the prince, and producing it, he showed it to Allee Neemroo, informing him, at the same time, of the circumstances under which he had received it.

“Think you,” said he, “that this ring can be of use in the present case?”

“A singular coincidence this, indeed,” said Allee, examining the signet with interest. “I have no doubt of its influence on Meerza Taher; and with him to aid you, the matter will be simple. And now give ear and remember my instructions. After your arrival in Ispahan, wherever you may be placed, you will receive a visit from one of my agents, whom you will know by a sign that shall be taught you. Show him that ring, entrust it to him if he request it, and leave the rest to him.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRIAL.

IN a few days, the Sheikh-ul-Islam took his departure for the capital ; and in his train went Hoossein, under the charge of Allee Neemroo. The first part of the journey was performed without accident and in comfort, the only drawback on the part of the former to enjoyment being the doubt, which in spite of Allee's repeated assurances, he could not shake off, as to what might be his fate on arriving at Is-pahan, and the far more disquieting uncertainty regarding that of his beloved Ausieh. But, by the time they arrived at Gilpaigaun, a fresh cause of anxiety was added to the rest, in the sudden absence of his friend Allee, whose place was filled by the gloomy and taciturn Noor Shah, who, to all the earnest inquiries of Hoossein, regarding the friend who was his sole hope and support in so trying a situation, would return no reply, except the one so often reiterated, that time and patience would discover all ; that his person was as secure as when Allee himself was with him, and that business

of importance, which could neither be transacted by deputy, nor deferred, had called that personage away.

Little comfort did all this convey to Hoossein, who, such is the infirmity of human nature, began, in spite of the many proofs he had received of Allee's attachment and earnest efforts to save him, to entertain apprehensions that he was abandoned, and that finding the combination too powerful to be withstood with hope of success, his friend had withdrawn and left him to his fate. Such thoughts were, however, but passing clouds, the exhalations of despondency, which will rise on the mind in hours of lassitude and exhaustion; but which are dissipated by the bright sun of reviving hope on the morning of a new day. Noor Shah had hitherto proved a faithful though a blunt uncourteous protector; and why was he to be doubted now? So Hoossein tranquilized his mind, and though it was not without a pang that he passed the mouth of the glen that led to his own once pleasant home, he completed the remainder of the journey with composure, if not with cheerfulness.

The party entered Ispahan almost at the same hour that Hoossein with the village deputies had reached it on his first memorable visit; and the sight of the vast city covering the plain with its world of mingled palaces and

hovels, the long bazaars with their living stream of men and animals, and the roar of the busy crowd, called up a flood of touching recollections in his mind. The present stood in strange and dubious contrast with the past. Was the promise on which his hopes now rested to be less fallacious than the last? Was the whisper of future rest and joy, that now and then arose in his soul, to be trusted? Plunged into the bustle of the bazaar, he was roused from these reflections by the rude voice of a servant of the Sheikh's, who commanded him to keep up with the cavalcade, and directed some of the armed attendants to take care that the prisoner did not give them the slip.

The expression rung harshly on his ear; nor was the pain it produced at all alleviated, when, after reaching the Maidaun Shahee, the party halted for awhile at the Allee-kapi gate, where the Darogha of the police having been summoned to speak with the Sheikh-ul-Islam, Hoossein was given over to the hands of that officer's furoshes. While being led forward from his station in the cavalcade to the presence of the Darogha, the young man cast a look upon his persecutor, in whose countenance though tranquil he could easily detect a malicious satisfaction little calculated to give comfort to his victim; but no long time was permitted him to dwell upon it, for the

furoshes, at the order of their master hurried him off towards a pile of building, within the precincts of the palace, near the quarters of the royal guard. There, in an inner cell, and once more strongly bound, was he left to pass the night. A meal was furnished which hunger forced him to devour; but no further communication was permitted from without.

By dawn of morning, however, Hoossein was awakened by the opening of his cell; and looking towards the entrance became aware of the presence of two men, who advanced directly towards him. One, a stranger, probably one of the Darogha's people, and his guard, having merely cast a glance over his person, as if to see that all was right, took up the empty dishes and returned towards the door. There was something, however, in the appearance of the other, though dressed like his companion, which seemed familiar to Hoossein, though he could not recollect the features. He also approached, and leaning down towards him, as he still remained seated, uttered in a low tone the following words, Behak-e-Koodrut-ul-Kudeer! *Nishán be-deh!**

The young man knew that this was the promised visitor, and hope revived in his soul. Instantly pulling out his ring, he showed it to

* Give me the token.

the dervish, for such he knew him to be, replying,

“*Nishân hameen ust.*—This is the token.”

“It is well,” replied the other, “give it to me.”

Hoossein cast a searching look on the dervish, who comprehended the cause of his irresolution. “Doubt not,” said he. “Gold while in the mine continues dross; to be useful it must be used. Remember Elwund and Kerman-shah.” Hoossein on hearing these words, fully convinced, gave the ring; the men retired, and he patiently awaited the result.

This was not far distant. On the afternoon of the same day, two officials belonging to the Dewân-Beggee came to Hoossein’s place of confinement, and dragged him, bound as he was, to the tribunal of that officer. The brutal manner in which this was performed, and the absence of even a single friendly countenance to cheer the prisoner as he went to trial, perhaps to death, was sufficiently depressing in spite of all his new raised hopes; nor was it particularly encouraging to observe among those, who occupied the apartment where the judge was seated, the Sheikh-ul-Islam himself, supported by several priests and Moollahs. Still Hoossein desponded not. He knew his danger and the power arrayed against them. He knew that innocence or guilt was of little moment, be-

cause the true question was not whether he were guilty, but how he might most effectually be crushed ; still the visit of the morning had re-assured him. It afforded proof that he was not abandoned ; that a powerful influence was stirring in his favour, and in spite of the lowering aspect of present circumstances, his bosom beat with hope.

Being led through the crowd which occupied the court, to the front of the window where the judge sat, the furoshes meanwhile holding the band which secured his arms and every now and then giving him a punch or a blow, with their large sticks, that personage inquired what crime was laid to the prisoner's charge ? A secretary having informed him of this, and having read the specified offences, the accuser's witnesses were called for ; upon which several persons came forward, and declared that the prisoner was known to them as one of the principals in an attack made upon a party of unoffending travellers, who had sought hospitality and accommodation at the village, some of them being servants of his Majesty, others attendants upon the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân ; and several of whom had lost their lives in the fray ; the whole being done in defiance of a royal Ruckum, and thus amounting to an act of rebellion against his Majesty.

No sooner had this testimony been given,

than there arose a yell of women and children, who along with several men rushed forward, calling aloud for justice on the murderer of their relatives, their husbands, fathers, brothers, sons ; blood for blood, and life for life !

“ And what hast thou, unfortunate wretch, to say to all this ? Thou hearest what these allege against thee ? What madness has turned so young a man into so atrocious a murderer and rebel ? Speak, and tell the truth.”

On this appeal, Hoosseïn stepped forward, so as to be more within hearing of the Dewan-Beggee. He first made a solemn denial of the alleged charges, and then gave as short and clear account as he could, of the circumstances that had led to the fatal event in the village, now so invidiously and falsely brought against himself ; setting forth how a deputation had come from the village, which having humbly represented the case to his majesty, by regular petition, had received the royal pardon for the very offence of which he was now again accused ; that on their return they had found the village plundered and destroyed, as was believed, by a party of the same persons who had committed the first outrage, supported by a band of thieving Buchtiarees ; and that he, having been sent to inquire after the fate of the captives, and to negotiate for their redemption or release, had been taken captive him-

self by the Sheikh-ul-Islam's servants, and by him carried prisoner to Ispahan, upon this false accusation ; that as for the blood which had been shed, he had nothing to do with it, having sought rather to save than to destroy even the very ruffians who had insulted them, and having in fact succeeded in preserving one, if not more, from the hands of the enraged peasants.

The judge heard him patiently, suppressing, from time to time, the noise which was frequently made by his clamorous accusers, and giving him full time to make his statement. When he had concluded, the Dewan-Beggee took up the discourse, saying " All this sounds very well, young man ; but where are the witnesses of your veracity ? How are we to know that all this is truth, and that you are not attempting to throw dust in our eyes, and thus to defeat the objects of justice ? "

" My lord," replied Hoosseïn, " your servant would represent, that he was made prisoner far from his home ; and expecting nothing of what has happened, is unprepared with witnesses ; of whom, however, his own village could even yet furnish a sufficient number. There are others, too ; but how, thus bound and confined, am I to discover them ? "

" Son of a dog ! " exclaimed the Sheikh-ul-Islam himself, unable, as it appeared, to bridle

his impatience and displeasure at the opportunity thus given the young man of speaking in self-defence ; “ Son of a dog ! thou knowest well that to prove what thou hast advanced is impossible ; that neither can any case of outrage or insult against thy miserable village be made out ; nor that any pardon was granted by his Majesty for the crime committed in repelling that alleged outrage. Why should the Dewan-Beggee give ear to such a Napâk (unclean villain) ? He has the word and assurance of ourself, who was near the spot, and made all suitable inquiries into the affair ; and if he requires further evidence, he may have that of many persons far more deserving of credit than any the culprit could, by possibility bring forward, were he even at large. Let not precious time then be wasted, but let justice have free course ; and direct the culprit to be delivered into the hands of those whose relatives he has wantonly murdered.”

“ It is assuredly true,” said the judge, “ that in the absence of witnesses his assertions are valueless, and cannot weigh against the word of the Sheikh-ul-Islam. But thou saidst there was other testimony besides thy fellow villagers who are absent ; name this testimony, that we may judge how far thy words are to be depended on or otherwise ?”

“ Alas !” replied Hoosseïn, whose hopes be-

gan to sink at observing the effect produced by the speech of his enemy, "what can I say? what use is there in speaking, when my words are set down against me as untruths? But, by the head of the Dewan-Beggee, and by the Shah's crown, I swear, not only that all I have stated is strictly true, but that Allee Verdee Khan, the Wâli of Louristan himself, were he present, could affirm to the fact of the Shah having directed the Perwanneh of pardon to be delivered to us; and it was accordingly given to my father and other elders of Ameenabâd, who, no doubt, could still produce it."

"Hear ye his lies! his barefaced falsehoods!" said the Sheikh-ul-Islam, with a taunting tone. "Well has he chosen to take the name of an absent nobleman, who cannot disclaim the unwarrantable freedom! Had the Wâli been here, we should have had no such impudent assertion. Why waste we time on such trash!"

"So far as his assertions respecting the Wâli are concerned," remarked an old man, who was seated in a corner of the Dewan-Beggee's apartment, "I can myself bear witness to his speaking correctly; for I was at the salaam that morning, and remember well the Wâli pleading the cause of the villagers of Ameena-bâd. I remember, too, that his Majesty issued orders for making out the Perwanneh of pardon."

“In the name of Allah, Hadjee Asker!” said the Sheikh-ul-Islam, frowning on the person who had last spoken, “how long is it since you have set up as the defender of villains and murderers, and begun to oppose justice? See these poor people demanding vengeance; the price of blood for relatives murdered by this young *Kumbucht* *—you do not mean to say they have not lost their relatives? Then why seek, for a moment, to deprive them of what is their due by our sacred law? Wullah Billah! this savours not of your usual wisdom, Hadjee?”

“With your pardon, Meerza, I have stated only the truth; and truth should be at all times spoken, nor should any creature of God be denied the benefit of it, especially when life is at stake. Defender of villains and murderers! La-illah-il-ullah!”

During these observations, a person entered the room and whispered some words into the judge’s ear. The communication appeared to occasion him some perplexity; but after a few moments’ consideration, he remarked to those near him, “Assuredly there must be some truth in what the poor wretch has averred respecting the Wâli, or Hadjee Asker would never have confirmed it as he has done. But, innocent or

* Wretch.

guilty, the affair, after all, is one of life and death, and must await the Shah's decision ; so my present resolution is merely to report what has passed to his Majesty, who, no doubt, will desire to see and hear the man himself. The Centre of the Universe will himself recollect, no doubt, whether the accused was ever in the presence, and can convict and punish him if he has told us an untruth. It is my order, therefore, that the prisoner be sent back in safety to his place of confinement, until his Majesty's will shall be known."

"*Astafferullah !*" exclaimed the Sheikh-ul-Islam, in a voice of great impatience, "God forbid we should impose on the Shadow of the Universe, whom may Allah long preserve ! so much unnecessary trouble. What ; does the matter regard a king or a state, or even the governor of a province ? *La-illah-il-ullah !* no ; it is but a youth of the dregs of a rebellious village ; a dog among dogs, who has dared to cast aspersions on the wise and the learned of the land. We ourselves have not escaped his defilement ! In the name of Allah, Dewan-Beggee, have done with this child's play ; settle the business, send him to hell, or to the avengers of blood at once, and let the vermin be brushed from our path."

"*Ai Wahi !* What expressions are these, Meerza ?" responded the Judge, in an under

tone to the Sheikh-ul-Islam. "Such might, no doubt, be an easy way of getting rid of trouble; but would it tend to exalt the Shah's name for justice, or his humble servant's character for honest dealing? What would become of his Majesty's reputation as *Ryot-pur-wur*, protector of his subjects, were such to be the mode of dealing with those who make statements or complaints? By the Shah's death! my own head might soon be found in jeopardy. Child's play call you it! By the holy Kaaba, I might soon be called on for the price of blood myself. Be satisfied; this is the King's affair, and he must take it in hand. By your own head, Meerza, were I to do otherwise, there would be danger to all concerned; and that I tell you in your ear. What then? You have influence with his Majesty; work that as you will; but I must do my duty."

Dark as night grew the Sheikh-ul-Islam's face, and his eyes flashed daggers; but the Dewan-Beggee, without heeding these signs of wrath, made a signal to his people, and speaking a few words to a secretary, Hoosseïn was forthwith removed back to his place of confinement, where he was left as before. This was a reprieve almost un hoped for by the young man, whose apprehensions had again been strongly excited by the bitter hostility and remorseless array of false witnesses, which had

been mustered to insure his destruction; and again did his hopes revive, for even in this temporary relief, he recognised the agency of that power to which alone, under Heaven, he had to trust. That mere attachment to the principles of justice, or a regard for the credit of his Sovereign should have led the judge to treat him so leniently in the face of so powerful an opposition, seemed, after all that had occurred, too improbable to be believed; and he could not avoid dwelling on the possibility that the long cherished and mysterious ring, which only that morning he had intrusted to the dervish messenger, was already operating in his favour.

Of the royal tribunal he entertained less dread than he did of one, in which his enemies could speak at will and exert more unrestrainedly than in the presence of their sovereign their rancorous animosity; nor did he abandon the hope that his Majesty might recollect the circumstances of his former appeal, and afford his own powerful testimony to the truth of what he had advanced. So he nerved his mind to the trial, and resolved to watch every opportunity of exciting sympathy in the monarch's breast.

The day passed without further occurrence; and night found him once more the solitary tenant of his cell. Hoosseïn knew that it was the

royal custom to receive petitions and hear causes on certain days after morning prayers ; and he thought it not unlikely, that on the morrow at that time, his fate might be decided. But the hours passed on and still no summons came. A frugal breakfast was brought him by a silent attendant, who left him as soon as he had eaten it. About the hour of *Assr* however, two furoshes entered the cell, and telling him to rise, led him with less rudeness than before, towards the Allee-kapi. He entreated them to say whither they were leading him, but the only answer given was "You will soon see."

As they passed through the quarters of the guard, where there were some strangers collected to gaze at the prisoners, the eye of Hoosseïn lighted on one in the habit of a dervish, who, as they advanced, stood doggedly in their path, uttering low sounds, as if he sought for charity.

"Give way, madman!" said one of the furoshes. "Give way and let us pass," and he pushed him aside.

"Ay," replied the dervish, "yaboos will kick, and dogs will howl until they feel the stick. Pass on. We regard you not. For, by the *mighty of mightiest*, ye shall not prevail."

While saying this, his eye was directed towards Hoosseïn with a look full of meaning. The young man struck by the expression returned the glance with one of equal intelligence,

and though no more passed between them, he felt assured that his friends were about him.

Hoossein was now placed in a small ante-chamber, close to the seat of justice, and near to the balcony, where the Shah himself was wont to sit on public days. In the Maidaun there was a crowd, though by no means excessive, for the Shah's popularity had not increased during the latter years of his reign. After a lapse of some time, a bustle within, the fire of camel artillery, and the salute of the guards, with the striking up of the Nokarakhaneh, commenced the approach of the monarch, on whose appearance a chorus of exclamations for mercy or for justice arose from the sundry petitioners in the square below. Hoossein was then brought forth in front of the balcony; but scarcely had he made his appearance, when a party of men and women collected together in one place, set up a shrill cry, calling aloud for "Justice on the murderer! Blood for blood! The blood of him who had made them widows or orphans! who had slain their husbands, and brothers!" Hoossein recognised in them the same persons who had been so clamorous before the Dewan-Beggee on the preceding day.

Silence being ordered, and the petition from this party being handed to his Majesty, he commanded it to be read, which was done by

the chief secretary. In the meantime, Hoossein cast his eye upwards to discover if he could, who were the persons in immediate attendance upon his Majesty. He could observe but few of the nobles or men of the military order, but saw that the greater number were priests or meerzas; and of these two were honoured with seats at the lower end of the balcony: these were the Moollah Bashee, and the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Ispahan, the latter of whom he knew to be the father of his oppressor, and the gloomiest bigot of the whole priesthood. The son himself, the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân, stood near them, together with many others of the religious orders of whom he knew nothing.

The petition being read, the King commanded the accused to be brought forth; and Hoossein did think that the royal eye rested upon him with a glance of recognition. "Who knows aught of the accusers?" demanded his Majesty; "and what proof do they adduce of the guilt of him they accuse? Who answers for them?"

"May I be your Majesty's sacrifice," replied a respectable looking person, coming forward, "I know the people, they are worthy of credit. Their representation is correct; I was present on the occasion when their relatives were put to death. That young man was one of the most active among the murderers."

"And I," said another person, stepping forth, "can also testify to that fact. The prisoner certainly committed the acts he is charged with."

"And who are these men?" demanded his Majesty, of the Dewan-Beggee, who stood in full costume in presence below.

"They represent themselves to be servants of the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân, Centre of the universe!" replied the Dewan-Beggee; "further they are unknown to your slave."

The Shah looked towards the Sheikh, who making his obeisance, replied, "May I be your Majesty's sacrifice, they are, or rather were my servants, and are persons worthy of credit."

"And what says the accused in reply to the charge?" demanded the Shah.

"He denies the charge, Protector of the universe," responded the Dewan-Beggee, "and avers that the men, who were killed in a fray at Ameenabâd, had provoked their fate, by attempting to pillage the villagers and carry off a girl, on pretence of having a royal order to do so."

"Ameenabâd?" repeated the Shah. "Surely there was some such affair connected with that village before us not long since. Was there not, Meerza Ahmed?" added his Majesty turning to a secretary who was present.

"There was, Protector of the universe! A deputation came from the village, and presented

a petition at the foot of the throne ; the subject matter was much the same as this now stated, and a warrant of pardon was then issued by the royal command. It is registered in the royal records."

"Then how is it that this youth stands here again accused of the same crime?"

"May I be your Majesty's sacrifice," said the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Ispahan. "It appeared on further inquiry, that these men had dared, on that occasion, to insult the shadow of the universe by false statements; and a ruckum was granted on these grounds from the Dewan-khaneh, for the apprehension and punishment of certain individuals accused of being principals in the violence committed at the village; and the relatives of the deceased have come to the foot of the throne to sue for the retribution of blood, which cannot be lawfully withheld."

"If this youth be one of the accused," said his Majesty, "let him speak for himself. No one can lawfully be given up to the avengers, until proved guilty of the crime laid to his charge."

The royal order having been intimated to Hoossein, he made a graceful obeisance, and stimulated into energy by the active malice of his enemies, he gave a modest and succinct account of all that had occurred, and ended

with a solemn denial of any particular or pre-meditated share in the fray which had caused the death of the Gholaulums; while, on the contrary, he claimed credit for having saved more than one life, on that very occasion, by his personal interference.

“ I can answer for his having saved one life, at least,” said a voice from among the crowd; “ for the dagger was at my throat, when that young man struck it aside, and rescued me.”

“ And what hadst thou to do there ?” demanded the Shah. “ Wast thou among those who sought to maltreat the King’s Ryots ?”

“ May I be your Majesty’s sacrifice ; I was not then my own master ; but the youth has told the truth. The Ryots were provoked to do what they did.”

“ Protector of the universe !” observed one of the Moollahs, who stood in the apartment with the King, “ let thy servant be excused for his presumption ; should not that man be examined ? He has confessed himself to have been one of the party, and can tell, no doubt, every thing that occurred on the occasion ; perhaps he might point out the instigators of the outrage.”

“ To what purpose, Meerza Hadee, should the time of the Centre of the universe be wasted thus ?” said the Sheikh-ul-Islam. “ What has happened, is past. It is not denied that the men were put to death, and there are witnesses to the fact, that this youth

was active in the murder. What more can be necessary?"

"Nay, Meerza, with your pardon, there are witnesses on both sides, and the last has declared that the youth was active rather, in rescuing, than destroying; surely, he should be further examined."

In the meantime the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and the Moollah Bashee, both rising, went forward, and kneeling at the edge of his Majesty's musnud, commenced an earnest conversation with the Shah, which continued for many minutes. His Majesty appeared greatly perplexed, turning from one to the other with an expression of extreme uneasiness, as each alternately addressed him, until after some very emphatic gestures the two holy men returned to their seats. His Majesty then mused for a while, bending his eyes upon the ground, and, at length, with great apparent reluctance, summoning the Deewan-Beggee, informed him that the Sheikh-ul-Islam had, at length, convinced him, that the youth was deserving of punishment; that his desire was to have saved him; but that justice was sacred, and however averse to severity, it was his duty to take care that it should be duly administered.

His Majesty was still speaking, when a stir in the passage to the royal balcony attracted notice, and all but the Shah, himself, were seen to draw up and make a profound obeisance to

a young man of prepossessing appearance and noble presence, who, on entering in haste, stepped forwards to the royal seat, and having prostrated himself, with his face to the ground, raised himself again to his feet ; and assuming an attitude of profound respect, said,

“ May God preserve your Majesty ; if permission be granted, I have a representation to make to the Presence.”

The Shah gazed at the petitioner, at first with surprise, if not with anger ; but not ill-pleased, as it seemed to be interrupted in a very disagreeable duty, he replied in a mild and encouraging voice :

“ Say on, my son, you have permission ; what is your desire ?”

“ Let me be your Majesty’s sacrifice ! I would represent that while hunting, lately, near a village in the district of Gilpaigaun, your son was placed in imminent danger, and nearly lost his life. It was saved only by the activity and energy of that young man, who stands there in peril of his own life. He aided me, and tended me with care, when sorely bruised and greatly in need of kindness. I entreat your Majesty to pardon him ; whatever his fault, be it laid upon my head.”

“ Indeed, and is it so ?” said the Shah, with a brightening countenance. “ Art thou sure of the truth of what thou sayest, my son ?”

“ Centre of the universe ! there is no doubt

of the fact. His person is well known to your servant; and I have further and unerring proof, that it is himself, and no other."

"If this be so," said his Majesty, casting a look of anxious doubt towards the two chief priests, "the state owes him a service. If he has been concerned in destroying a life, he has likewise been instrumental in preserving one; and surely the blood so preserved may be held worth more than that which has been shed. Is it not so, Meerza?"

"Doubtless," replied Meerza Mahomed Baukher, "the shadow of the Most High has spoken the words of truth and wisdom; they cannot be gainsaid. The blood of princes is sacred, and so must be regarded by all. But the holy Korân declares, nevertheless, that blood must be expiated by blood; such is the law of our Blessed Prophet, honoured be his name! No doubt it is for the King to decide; but it is for us, the servants of Allah, to declare the truth."

"Certainly," said the Moollah Bashee, "the Sheikh-ul-Islam has declared the truth; the matter admits of no doubt."

The countenance of the Shah was again overcast with perplexity; well did he know the inexorable natures of his two despotic religious advisers, and distress and reproach were sin-

gularly mingled with timidity in the look which he cast upon them. But the young prince was not to be so easily repulsed. Again casting himself at his father's feet, he exclaimed in earnest tones,

“ In the name of Allah, father, listen to your son ! Heed not these cold-blooded priests. Let it not be said that the Protector of the universe, the Refuge of the distressed, and the Shadow of the most merciful God upon earth, gave up to death the man who had saved the life of his son—an unworthy bud of the royal tree—but in whose veins flows the sacred blood of the King of kings ; and for what ? because certain men, scarcely known by any here, accuse him of a crime, questionable in itself, and of which other witnesses have boldly declared him to be innocent ! ”

“ Let the Shahzadeh excuse the boldness of his servant,” interrupted the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân. “ The men *are* known, and they have declared that they saw this young wretch in the act of assaulting the men who have been slain ; that is proof sufficient of his guilt. What more remains to be said ? The breasts of these poor creatures burn when they see the murderers of their relatives ; they look for justice at the King's hands, and God forbid that they should look in vain ! ”

“The Refuge of the afflicted is a fountain of goodness and mercy,” struck in the Moollah Bashee. “Dear is the blood of his subjects in his eyes, and painful is it to him to pronounce the sentence of death, even when demanded by justice. But it is the duty of the servants of the throne, whose heads are as his footstool, to take upon themselves the weight of such distress, and relieve their sovereign, by declaring to him the law which governs all the faithful, from the King to the Ryot. The Centre of the universe must be aware that justice claims the life of this young man, and duty requires that the sentence should not be delayed.”

“La-illah-il-ullah !” exclaimed the Shah, in great distress and utter perplexity. “La-illah-il-ullah ! may God direct his servant in this strait to pronounce a wise, an equitable judgment; he is too weak and powerless to decide himself. God knows, my son, that willingly would I hearken to your prayer, but the law, the sacred law, how shall we dare to violate that venerable rule of our conduct, as expounded by such competent authority?”

“Accursed be the law-breakers!” pronounced the Moollah Bashee, in a solemn voice; “so says our sacred book !”

“The man who obstructs justice upon earth shall suffer condemnation in the day of judgment!” intonated the Sheikh-ul-Islam, in ac-

cents of great severity. The Shah trembled, and those near his person might have seen the large drops of perspiration bedewing his forehead.

“It is in vain, my son,” said his Majesty to the Prince, who still knelt at his father’s feet. Wouldst thou subject thy parent and thy King to the pains of the law-breaker? Wouldst thou shut him out from Paradise? No; these Moolahs are in the right. Let justice have its free course. Let the Dewan-Beggee deliver over the unfortunate wretch to the ministers of vengeance. Let blood pay for blood!”

“Amen!” echoed the priests, and the fatal signal was made; and Hoossein, believing all was over, cast one breathless gaze around, as if appealing for justice and for aid, before his eyes should close for ever in death, when a voice from below was heard to exclaim, “Amen! let justice be done! be vengeance duly taken; but be it on the guilty, not upon the innocent! Therefore, harm not the youth, for he is innocent. I have a representation to lay before the footstool of the throne!”

All eyes turned upon the spot whence the voice issued, and Allee Neemroo, a personage well known to many present, was seen making his way rapidly through the circle which closed round the space beneath the Balakhaneh. The Dewan-Beggee, who from the first had appeared

disposed to befriend the prisoner, retained him in spite of the clamour of the blood-seekers, who demanded that the sentence should be carried into execution. All was wonder and excitement, for the bold and confident, yet respectful bearing of the horse-dealer betokened something more from his address than mere words.

With a profound obeisance to the Shah, he solicited permission to speak as a witness for the accused ; and this being granted, he began ;

“ Refuge of the destitute ! the guilt of this young man rests on the declaration of two witnesses ; and these men and women, claim his blood in retribution for that of relatives whom they aver to have been slain by him, or through his means. Now, your slave is ready to prove, first, that these men and women have no claim whatever to what they demand, inasmuch as not one of them is related to either of the two deceased Gholams ; and, secondly, that the two witnesses, to whomsoever they may now appertain, or did at that time belong, are in no degree worthy of trust or confidence ; so that their testimony cannot in justice be received against the man whom they accuse. As for the first, the pretended relatives of the dead—lo ! even while I speak they are not longer here ; the voice of truth has dispersed the gathering cloud of evil and falsehood.”

It was even so. The group of complainants,

even those who so clamorously demanded the blood of the accused youth, had disappeared. In vain did the officials of the Dewan-Beggee summon them to come forward, and refute the declarations of this new witness. Nowhere could they be found ; while from the crowd there arose a murmur of astonishment and various exclamations, as “ La-illah-ul-allah ! *Een cheezee ghareeb ust ; Ajaib ! Een che nakl, ust,*” and so forth.

“ And now,” continued Allee, “ if a poor fakeer like me might, without presumption, address himself to so holy and mighty a personage as the Sheikh-ul-Islam Meerza Jemal-u-Deen, I would solicit him to declare whether he considers these men, his former servants, to be still, as he would have us believe, worthy of credit ; whether their characters may not have undergone some change, since they quitted his respectable service ; and whether it is not probable that they, like the false relatives, who vanished when they saw a chance of detection, may have some secret motive for seeking the destruction of this young man ; and conscious of being themselves culprits in the affair at the village, may they not be desirous of removing so important a witness of their guilt ? Will the Meerza be pleased to reply ?”

The Shah, again perplexed, cast an inquiring look at Meerza Jemal-u-Deen. That personage,

had he been closely observed, might have been seen to betray no slight discomposure on hearing the voice of Allee Neemroo, and finding him make his appearance on the stage. The two Moollahs made more than one effort to prevent attention being paid to his words; and when foiled in this, attempted to interrupt him at every sentence. But the manner, as well as the matter of Allee's speech, was such as forced attention; and the Shah felt too much interested and excited by the communication to suffer himself to be distracted from it by the buzz from the knot of Moollahs about him; nor was it until the direct appeal to Mirza-Jemalu-Deen had been made, that his Majesty turned his regards upon that person.

But the Meerza's decision and firmness seemed to have abandoned him. "Refuge of the destitute," said he, in a lowered tone, "what statement can I make to such an appeal? No doubt some time has elapsed since the men were in my service; they may not be now what they were; but inquiry shall be made, and, if it please the Centre of the universe, to-morrow."

"Ay, to-morrow or next day; be it so, be it so," hastily replied his Majesty, gladly catching at even the temporary respite from a scene which had greatly embarrassed him; and, allowing not a moment for remonstrance, he di-

rected the witness to be informed, that his proofs against those on the other side should be called for at a future time: then, as if fearful of some further cause of delay, in spite of the groans and murmurs of the priests, he rose up, and, dismissing the assembly, retired from the balakhaneh. In the meantime Allee Neemroo approached the prisoner, and, before he could be led away by the furoshes, or at all events unopposed by them, found means to whisper a word or two of encouragement, which, coupled with his almost miraculous preservation, tended greatly to his comfort and confidence, as he re-entered his cell of confinement.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

DEEP was the sleep of Hoosseïn, after the restless agitation of so many painful hours had subsided into that lassitude of mind and body which succeeds sustained excitement. How long his slumber had continued he knew not, but he was awakened by the pressure of a hand upon his arm, and starting up and gazing, as if still in a dream, his eye met that of the horse-dealer, who was leaning over him, and the clasp of whose hand it was that had broken his repose. Silence was enjoined by a mute gesture, and Hoosseïn, thus debarred from the privilege of speech, cast his eyes about in search of that information which he could not ask for. He saw that four persons had entered his cell, but how, and who they were, he could not discover, until the piercing eyes and impenetrable physiognomy of Noor Shah, peering forth from under a head dress, worn for disguise, convinced him, that unless his faculties were still under the influence of sleep,

he was in the hands of his old friends, the dervishes.

In the meantime, silently but swiftly did Allee and his people remove the bonds which still restrained the young man's arms; and throwing an old Arab cloak over his shoulders, and replacing the turban which he wore, by a sorry piece of checquered stuff, the horse-dealer himself placed in his hands a sword and a dagger for the waist. Thus accoutred was he led forth, first through the outer cell, and then past the quarters of the guard, where not a challenge was given and no symptom of vigilance appeared, to a postern or wicket in the palace wall. Here, for a moment, they halted; a low tap on the door was responded to by its opening, as if spontaneously. Not a soul was seen, and the party in another instant were beyond the formidable walls.

Rapidly passing along the open space at their foot, they turned down a lane which led into the city, and pursued their course along the deserted streets and empty bazaars; nor was it until they had reached some considerable distance, that Allee, in a low impressive tone, said,

“ You are now, praise be to God ! secure from one great danger, but the evil one is abroad, and there may still be work to do; so be prepared to use the arms you have received.

Strike all who may oppose us, and spare not, Bismillah !”

Hoossein now observed that Allee was armed with a mace, ending in an iron spike, such as he had seen frequently carried by the dervishes.

On went the five, silently and rapidly traversing various quarters of the city, but tending always towards the western gates, till turning into an opening space where several streets met, a sound of the trampling of horses was heard, and a party of armed cavaliers, attended by several men on foot, some of whom bore torches, came pouring on from one of the avenues.

The attention of Allee was roused by the first uncertain sound. Listening for a moment he gave an order to one of his dervishes, who immediately drew a horn from beneath his cloak. In another instant the sound became more distinct.

“Sound !” said he, and the horn being forthwith winded gave utterance to certain of those uncouth howls, which are the well-known gathering notes of dervishes.

“Be ready, they are upon us,” said Allee to Hoossein, who immediately drew his sword, while the other grasped his mace with a resolute hand, and the remaining three fakeers prepared themselves also to resist the coming attack. Nor did it tarry long, for no sooner had the foremost of the horsemen perceived

the fugitives, than in a voice, which Hoossein immediately recognised as that of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, of Hamadân, he exclaimed,

“There they are, men; in the name of Allah, seize and slay them!” and seconding his words by actions, he pushed full speed against the fakeers, who on their part, awaited the onset without flinching.

The night, though clear above, afforded too little light to display the inequalities of the ground; and the torches borne by the Sheikh’s people lent but an uncertain glare; so that in his blind eagerness to ride down the runaways, the horse of the Sheikh-ul-Islam himself stumbled just within reach of the mace of Allee, which struck it on the head before it could recover its footing, and brought man and horse to the earth. Others came on; and the sound of the heavy blows from the weapons of the fakeers bore witness to the resolution with which they stood their ground, and repelled their assailants; who, on their side, struggled hard to close.

“Down with them both! Down with the accursed horse-dealer and his minion!” shouted the Sheikh, extricating himself from his fallen horse, while two of his people pressing forward, struck furiously at Hoossein. The youth made a blow at the foremost, which, doubtless, would have brought him to the ground, had not his

sword shivered to the hilt against his adversary's weapon, leaving him defenceless. Allee, whose eye was more employed in watching his rescued charge than in guarding himself, even in the heat of the combat, seemed intuitively aware of the accident, and with a rapid whirl of his mace beat down the man, whose sword was just descending on the young man's head. The other turned to face his new antagonist, while at the same moment the Sheikh himself having regained his footing sprung, dagger in hand, upon Allee.

An ejaculation, half shout, half groan, which escaped the horse-dealer thus doubly assailed, caught the ear of Hoossein, who, furious alike at the sight of his mortal foe, and the danger of his friend, drew his khunjer, and closing with the Sheikh, who, on his part, appeared regardless of aught but the destruction of his enemy, plunged it deep in his body. With a fierce execration, the Sheikh, losing hold of Allee, turned to revenge the wound he had received, by a violent, but random and easily parried, stroke. Hoossein returned the blow with surer hand, and, as his inveterate oppressor lay gasping at his feet in the pangs of death, raised his streaming dagger and exclaimed, "Hadjee! mother! friends! beloved ones! Praise be to Allah, ye are at length avenged!"

So wholly had every faculty been absorbed

in this fierce struggle, that Hoossein did not observe the increase of numbers on the scene, nor discover that the fight was at an end, until raising his eyes from the dying wretch before him, he cast around a look for his friend. Allee was near him leaning on his mace; his two principal assailants lay stretched beside their master, while the remainder of their party was making a hasty retreat before a number of armed fakeers and dervishes; who, hovering near in case of need, had obeyed the summons of their comrade's horn. Scarcely had he time to comprehend what was passing, when his own knees were clasped, and a well-known voice broke forth in a torrent of mingled affection and reproach. It was Caussim, from whom he had thus again been forcibly separated, and who now, in accents, scarcely intelligible from emotion, uttered upbraidings and lamentations in the same breath, and who again swore, *Wullah ! Billah !* that neither priest nor dervish, khan nor vizier, no, nor all the power of man, should ever again separate him, while alive, from his side.

“Inshallah ! it will not again be required my friend,” said Allee Neemroo, who, after issuing some orders to his people, now turned to Hoossein and his foster brother; “with that black-hearted and treacherous villain who lies before you there, terminate, please God, the

dangers and misfortunes of your master. Wretch and fool! did I not tell thee that in seeking to betray me, thou wouldst but find thy own destruction. Had the blow failed now, it would not have been long deferred; and now thou liest there, a poisonous snake, stifled in its own venom!" The miserable man gnashed his teeth as he lay, impotent, upon the ground, as if he felt the bitter sting which his adversary's triumph had implanted in his soul.

"But let us not delay," continued Allee; "bring the horses, and hark, make sure of this fiend; we have many fursucks yet to ride ere dawn." Four horses were now led forward, one of which was presented to Hoossein. He observed that Allee busied himself for a while about his garments, and wound a long sash about his body; but believing this to be only a preparative for a long and fatiguing ride, he thought nothing of it, and having mounted, away they went. The gateway was passed, and after rapidly treading the vast tract of orchard and garden ground that lay beyond the city, by a succession of lanes and byways, they reached the open country, and took a south-west course towards the Koh-i-Zurd.

By dawn of day they had already ridden far, and yet there was no sign of halting, nor any appearance of a spot, where refreshment of any sort could be procured had they desired any.

But the cold air of night, which rendered rapid movement rather agreeable than otherwise, prevented their feeling that exhaustion which milder weather might have produced, and they held on their course unwearied. As daylight increased, however, Hoossein remarked with alarm, that part of the horse-dealer's clothes were dyed with blood; and though he trusted that it belonged to others rather than to himself, he could not repress a thrill of apprehension, as he expressed his hope that his friend had received no injury.

The pale countenance of the horse-dealer contradicted his reply, as, smiling faintly, he assured the youth that the scratch was nothing. But when Hoossein, now seriously alarmed, entreated him to halt and have his wound examined, he replied that it was both useless and dangerous to lose time where they were. "Here nothing can be done. In two hours more we shall reach our destination; you will be safe, and I can then attend to myself; in the mean time let us press forward."

They did so; and broad daylight found them in a pastoral country, in a valley shut in with mountains, among which opened a narrower and more secluded glen, near the entrance to which they had arrived. Up this they turned, and made their way until the rocky hills, that bounded it, retreated somewhat from each other,

so as to form a basin of considerable extent. On the sunny side of this hollow, beneath a protecting rock, lay cradled a pleasant village, overlooking its cultivation and orchard grounds, which were irrigated by a clear stream that rushed from the mountain behind. It was a peaceful and a cheering scene ; and the heart of Hoossein, long wrung by anxiety and doubt, felt a welcome repose in looking upon it. This, it appeared, was their halting place ; for the party turned the heads of their willing horses up the track that led to it.

Winding through a maze of inclosures and dwellings, they rode on to a habitation, which was easily recognised as that of the village chief, for it was inclosed in a small court, by a wall with towers at each angle, and the gateway by which entrance was obtained could be closed against intruders. Through this entrance they passed, and halted at the door of the public apartment, where they were received by the owner in person, a hale and kindly-looking old man, who helped them, himself, to dismount. But he started when he saw the condition of the horse-dealer, who, pale and exhausted, and his apparel saturated with blood, was unable to alight without assistance.

“ Let it pass just now ;” replied he to his inquiring host. “ Here is your principal guest. Is all right ?”

“ All is right, thanks be to Allah,” replied the man, “ if you are safe, but—”

“ Fear not for me,” replied Allee, “ but take him in at once. Nay, Hoossein, leave me for a moment, I am with good and skilful friends ; do at present as I desire, as I entreat ! follow that good man, you will return to me when you please.”

There was something at once so earnest and significant in the manner of his friend as he spoke thus, that Hoossein, in spite of his anxiety, could not refuse obedience to his request ; but he resolved, be the cause of this request what it might, not to absent himself long ; for he had strong though secret fear as to the condition of his friend. In the mean time, he followed his host through a passage to a more retired quarter of the house, which obviously contained the female apartments. Stopping here, behind a curtained door, he spoke a few words which were answered from within. “ Enter,” said he, “ my son ; you are expected.” Hoossein agitated he scarce knew why, obeyed with mingled curiosity and apprehension. Slowly he raised the curtain, and saw within a female form leaning against the wall ; his heart beat quick as he timidly advanced towards her. A shriek burst from his lips, and Ausieh, his own Ausieh was in his arms !

Was it strange that the rapturous emotions

of a meeting like this, should drive from Hoossein's memory for a while, even the thoughts of that friend to whose zealous affection he owed not only this blissful re-union, but even his life itself. Yet not long could even the spell of his mistress's presence repress his feelings of gratitude and apprehension! Shortly mentioning his deep obligations to Allee, and his fears for that indefatigable friend, he left her to seek him.

Allee, who by this time had been removed into a more private and comfortable apartment, was lying exhausted on his couch. The paleness, which could be traced even through the swarthy hue of his weather-beaten countenance, was rendered more striking by a single spot of crimson that just began to show itself on either cheek;—harbinger of the fever which fatigue had produced in his veins. To Hoossein's earnest inquiries he merely replied, that as to his wound little could yet be said. A dressing had been applied, and until its effects should be seen, the issue must remain in doubt.

“Whatever be the result, my dear friend,” said he, “I have the comfort of having saved your life, when no other mortal could have done so; and of seeing the evil genius of your existence removed for ever from your path. But now leave me to repose, I am exhausted and require rest. La-illah-il-ullah! that this should have come upon me from *his* hand! But

so was it written, and otherwise it could not be."

He turned himself away and slept, or seemed to sleep : and Hoossein, his heart wrung with apprehension and sorrow, sought comfort in the presence of Ausieh.

Eager and anxious, it may be believed, were her inquiries regarding her former home and those, who in that terrible night had been scattered abroad or made captives like herself ; and not less earnest were the questions of Hoossein respecting her own adventures, and the chances by which she had been preserved from the dangers that appeared to threaten her on every side. But Ausieh had little to tell. From her companion Fâtmeh, at Kermanshah, he had in few words learned most of what had befallen the women after their capture ; and it clearly appeared that Roostum Beg, distrusting the Sheikh-ul-Islam's good faith, had withheld from him the Hadjee's grand-daughter, until his terms should be complied with ; and hoping sooner or later to make his profit of her, he had retained her in his own stronghold, while the rest were sent to Kermanshah for sale.

But during his attempts at negociation, both at Hamadân and Kermanshah, he discovered that the hue and cry raised in consequence of his wholesale dealings at the latter place, was likely to prevent his reaping any benefit from his ill-

gotten booty ; while, on the other hand, the Wâli of Louristan threatened to take cognizance of his daring offences against liberty and property in that vicinity. These considerations rendered the robber more open to certain overtures that were made to him for the restoration of the Ameenabâd captives ; and in the meantime, Ausieh was kept in safe and honourable custody under the charge of his own women.

“ And thus,” said she, “ I remained for several weeks, not unkindly treated, though sad and wretched at heart. Ah Hoossein ! you have suffered dreadfully ; I see it. I see it in your thin and haggard features, and your care-worn look. But I, Hoossein ! Oh ! Allah alone knows what I have endured, believing all my family slain, with my poor old grandfather ! also, yourself a prisoner or dead, perhaps ; and myself, a miserable captive, reserved for some horrid fate. Surely, surely it was the mercy of Allah that my brain became confused, and my senses torpid, so that I scarce knew, or felt, what was passing ! I should have gone mad, and died else ! Oh, what a dreadful time ! Yet, on looking back to it, all is dark ; a horrid whirl of black and fearful thoughts.

“ At length I was told to prepare for a journey ; I was to be taken home ! My heart leapt at the thought ; but so confused was my head, that I scarce comprehended what was said.

Yet, when they took me out from the dull, close chamber which had been my prison, and I felt the free and blessed air blowing around me, as I sat on the beast I was to ride, just as it used to do upon our own mountains, a weight seemed to be lifted from my breast. I breathed more freely, and a flood of tears rushed to my eyes. Oh! what a relief were those tears, Hoossein! It was as if the veil that hung over my faculties had been removed, and I could once more think, and remember, and feel! Then was it that the recollections of all that had happened came fresh and keenly on my soul, and I wept more bitterly than ever. Yet, bitter as they were, those tears did me good, and seemed to soothe the pain of my heart; then the promise made to me that I was going home, oh, how it made me long, and yet tremble! But from that hour I recovered something of my former health and strength.

“ On the fourth day we reached this place, where they told me I must wait until some of my friends should arrive to receive me. Friends! the word made my heart leap within me; but who could these friends be! How busily did I speculate on this question! The delay, it is true, alarmed me; but then I was so kindly treated; the people were so good, and tried so much to re-assure me, that I could not believe

any harm was intended me. Time, however, passed on, my impatience increased every hour. Ah! could I have guessed how all this anxiety was to terminate; I fear it would not have been diminished, though, oh heaven! how much of wretchedness should I have been saved! But we have met once more, Hoossein! *you* have been spared to me, dearest, and all besides can be borne!”

After a restless and distressing night, Allee Neemroo became evidently worse. His fever ran high, his wound was painful and inflamed, and at times the wildness of his looks and words betrayed delirium. Hoossein, equally grieved and alarmed, left not his couch for a moment, but watched his slightest movement, seeking to anticipate every want, and ever ready with the cool sherbet to slake the thirst which seemed to scorch up the sufferer's vitals. The day thus passed in the most painful suspense; nor did the night bring much relief; for though the fever might seem occasionally to abate, the pain and irritation continued extreme, and Hoossein saw with anguish that the strength of his frame would be unequal long to hold out against the violence of his sufferings. Yet, in spite of physical suffering, it was obvious that the mind of Allee remained firm and unshaken. Even the ravings of delirium gave proof that his thoughts were

generous and unselfish, and that the courage and energy, which marked his character, continued unquelled by the disease which preyed upon his frame. His conversation was often addressed to individuals of the fraternity, with whom, of late, it appeared he was still so closely united; and many a mystic apothegm did he mutter, and many a distich from the works of the Sooffee poets.

It was past the hour of afternoon prayers, when two mounted travellers arrived at the village. One of them proved to be Noor Shah; the other was of striking appearance, but a stranger to Hoossein. He was received by the Zâbit with profound respect, and by him immediately conducted to the sick man's room. No sooner had he cast a glance upon his countenance, than a half-repressed exclamation of mingled distress and surprise escaped his lips, and he shook his head, as, sitting down by the couch, he took the sick man's hand in his own, felt his skin, examined his eyes, and continued gazing on his face. After a few minutes, he called for a cup with some water and other ingredients, which being brought, he took from a small box certain drugs, and, compounding them with the rest, formed a draught, which he proceeded to administer to the patient.

Here, however, Hoossein thought fit to interfere, as he knew not who this personage

was and dreaded some secret mischief to his friend. Calling their host, he stated his doubts, and inquired what he knew about the person, who had thus volunteered his assistance, and whether he believed him to be qualified for the task.

“Be contented, and fear nothing,” replied the Zâbit. “In this person you may repose implicit confidence.”

But Hoossein still hesitated; upon which the stranger, smiling, took forth from a secret pocket a ring, which he held towards Hoossein.

“You are right, young man,” said he; “you are faithful and true to your friend; but be at ease, he is mine also; and let this token convince you, that neither he nor yourself have aught to dread from me. Know you this ring?”

Hoossein gazed on the signet, which, to his infinite surprise, he discovered to be the one he had himself received from the Prince, and delivered, when confined in Ispahan, to the dervish sent by Allee to receive it.

“Allah-il-ullah! is it possible?” exclaimed he, rising with respect. “Then who is it I see?”

“You see a friend, young man; let that suffice at present; in the meantime, we must minister to our suffering brother.”

Allee, who, though still affected by delirium,

appeared to recognise the person of the stranger, received and took the draught without difficulty; and such was its soothing virtue, that in less than a quarter of an hour the distressing restlessness appeared gradually to abate, and in double that space of time not only was he perfectly tranquil, but disposed, as it seemed, to drop into a sleep. When the stranger observed this, he said,

“Now let us leave him; the good effect of this medicine depends upon perfect quiet. We must retire, and take care that he shall not be disturbed.”

With these words he rose, and took the way to another apartment, with a readiness which proved him a frequent visitor at the place; and Hoossein followed him at once without further question.

“And now, my young friend,” said the stranger, after they had seated themselves, “your question shall be answered. Unnecessary mystery is foreign to my nature, and you shall know who I am. In me, behold that Meerza Taher, to whose good offices you have a double claim; first, from the devoted attachment borne to you by our suffering friend; and, secondly, from the duty and willing obedience I owe to him who was the owner of that ring, and who entrusted it to thee as a token for me.”

Hoossein attempted to express his deep sense of obligation, but the Meerza stopped him.

“ I tell you again that to me you owe nothing. I lent my aid to serve you at the desire of others ; but now that I have seen thee, youth, I rejoice, for thy own sake, that it has been effectual, however I may lament the price thy safety is like to cost.”

“ What price, in the name of Allah !” inquired Hoossein, with ready apprehension.

“ Seest thou not the condition of thy friend ? No blame to thee ; but was it not in rescuing thee that he came by this wound ?”

“ *Subhán ullah !* and you think him in danger ?” asked Hoossein, with increased alarm. “ For the holy prophet’s sake, tell me the truth.”

“ From me, my young friend,” said the Meerza, “ thou shalt hear nought but truth, be the consequences what they may. Our friend, I grieve to say so, is in serious danger. Whether the symptoms which I dread have been produced by the effect of a poisoned weapon, or by fatigue and exertion fretting a wound, which in itself is no trifle, as yet cannot be determined. From the character of him who inflicted it, there is cause to fear the first. When he awakes from the sleep which that draught is now producing, the truth may be known ; till then, we must hope in patience ; the issue is in the hands of Allah.”

“ Ai wahi ! ai wahi !” exclaimed Hoossein,

“ these are indeed heavy tidings. Allah ! Allah ! would that he had left me to my fate ! What were my life to his ? Oh, Allee, what a friend hast thou been to me ; how shall I survive thee ? ”

“ My son, be consoled. Who can alter what Providence has decreed ? The fate of thy friend was written in the book of destiny. Like others of the race of Adam, he must fulfil his lot, and we must bow to the Almighty will. Yet thou hast said the truth ; to thee he has been a true and zealous friend. ”

“ Ay, well may I say so ! ” rejoined Hoossein, mournfully ; “ and Allah knows how bitterly I shall feel his loss. Yet, oh God ! must it then be so ? Must we indeed have to mourn him ! Ai Wahi ! Ai Wahi ! dear, dear friend ! alas ! how did I merit so much devoted attachment ? By your own august head, Meerza, it has often struck me with wonder, that one, with so few pretensions to notice, should have excited such an interest in a heart like that of Allee, who, knowing the world so well, must have seen a thousand more deserving of his regard than I am ! It is true, that, even the very first time I saw Allee Neemroo, I was sensible of a corresponding inclination towards him, which increased every time I met him ; not even during the longest interval that separated us, did that feeling ever diminish ; nor did I cease

to long for his society. But all this is plain ; for, young and thoughtless as I was, his character interested me, and I loved his kindness and worth ; yet that he should entertain so remarkable an attachment to me, Wullah ! Billa ! I cannot account for it."

Meerza Taher smiled, " I wonder not, my son, at your perplexity," said he, " and yet the explanation is simple ; you feel it in your own breast, though unconscious of its meaning. Much as you have been thrown of late among that order, in whom the pure spirit, of love and devoted friendship pre-eminently dwells, you know little of its power or workings ; nor would it be possible in few words to explain so large a subject. Learn, however, that by the will of the beneficent Creator, a principle of sympathetic attraction pervades his whole works, producing both in animate and inanimate creatures the combinations necessary to their existence and reproduction ; disposing alike kindred mind and homogeneous matter to mingle and unite together according to their inherent affinities, yea, to search for each other among the mass of uncongenial beings, with an eagerness that cannot rest until the desired union is accomplished. When minds thus formed for each other chance to meet, this principle of sympathy begins immediately to operate, and they mingle in feeling as two drops of pure

water mutually attract other and melt into one. And though, in the human race, this sympathy, by a wise provision of the Almighty, is most widely developed, and acts most powerfully in individuals of opposite sexes, it does not the less evince itself in unions yet more pure, and not less binding; unions, by the world termed friendships, but which, all unsullied as they are by the grosser impulses of passion, and void of the selfishness of our nature, become refined and exalted to a degree that assimilates them to the character of heavenly love itself.

“Among beings wholly devoted to this world and its lusts, a sentiment so pure and heavenly can have no existence. But in proportion as a man withdraws from the debasing thralldom of worldly pursuits, and fixes his thoughts and affections on Heaven and the Creator, his perceptions of the divine being, who is *love*, and of the beauty of creation, which is pervaded by the spirit of that perfect love, become more clear and impressive; and he will learn to extend to that creation a portion of the rapturous feeling of which the Creator is the first object. But as in unions of the sexes, so also in those formed by that purer sentiment of which I speak, the law of sympathy impels us to a selection of the objects on which its disinterested love may be fitly lavished.

“Among the sect, to which our friend belonged, this sentiment has been cultivated with peculiar ardour, indeed to an extent which has subjected them to imputations of caprice and affectation in the selection of objects for these attachments. But the charge is groundless; for the very law which forms them precludes the exercise of volition. They are spontaneous, involuntary, beyond the control of those in whom they arise; and are, in fact, as frequently excited by age as by youth, by deformity as by beauty, and by those of either sex indifferently. But they are in all cases pure and passionless, though characterized by a devotion which pants to make every sacrifice, even that of life itself, for the beloved object.

“Such, my young friend, is the nature, and such the origin of Allee’s attachment to you; and were you as indifferent to the world as he is, and like him devoted to the contemplation of divine love and the glories of the one all pervading essence, you would doubtless be inspired with as perfect a devotion towards Allee, as he has evinced for you—the principle of sympathetic love is perfect in you both.

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Hoosseïn, who had hung upon the Meerza’s words while he spoke, “you have unfolded to me marvellous truths, for truths I feel them to be, my own heart tells me so; and yet how different—!”

He stopped, for he thought of the passionate love he bore to Ausieh, and practically felt the difference between it and the pure immaculate sentiment described by the Meerza. Yet he felt, that in one respect they differed not; for would he not willingly have sacrificed even life itself for her?

“Alas, father,” continued he, “little can I boast of the Sooffee’s purity, little desire do I experience for quitting the world or renouncing its cares or its pleasures.”

“I know it well, my son; nor is there any cause why you should do so: you are young, and still have hopes and ties—nay, blush not, they are innocent, yea, worthy of praise; but they bind you to the world, and in it and for it you must live while they endure. Yet forget not what you now have heard; and rest assured that at the last, he who thinks most of Heaven and least of earth will have the happiest end; and that the fewer your worldly ties, and the more your thoughts are devoted to your Creator, the more peaceful and tranquil will be your sojourn on earth, the less the pang of quitting it. But enough of this; your life is but beginning; and whether it shall prove blameless and happy, or turbulent and anxious, perhaps sinful and miserable, will depend mainly on yourself.

“You have borne your trials bravely hitherto; and your misfortunes, please God, are past

for a season ; should they produce a right effect upon your heart, and teach you the value of calm and peaceful enjoyment, your career may be useful and happy. But should either the voice of ambition, or a wild lust of adventure lure you again from the right way, or induce you to aspire to rank or power, beware of their snares, for they will lead you by a thorny path, to a desolate home and a broken heart, to poverty, misery, and dishonour."

"By your own soul, father!" exclaimed Hoossein, "you describe my very thoughts. I am sick of adventure, and the wickedness of the great, disgusts me. I pine for tranquillity and peace. Alas ! once I could say that these were mine ! I had a home, a sweet and pleasant spot, where there were friends to welcome my return from wandering, and the smile of affection to cheer my soul when weary or distressed. But, all is now gone ; that home is already desolate, its roofless walls are red with the blood of its murdered inmates, and nothing remains of all that was once so sweet and peaceful, but heaps of dust and ashes, the monuments of violence and murder !"

"In that painful reverse, my son, behold the confirmation of my words. In this sublunary world, what spot is there exempt from misery and death ? How then, should even your happy village the "Abode of Peace" itself, be

an exception to the common lot? Yet after all, God is merciful! and his goodness often deigns to heal the wounds which his wisdom sees fit to inflict. With you, my son, and with your people he hath dealt mercifully now. When you re-visit that beloved home, which Inshallah, you shall speedily do, you shall find it no longer desolate, and though the dead return no more, you will be welcomed by many a well known face, on your return to the pleasant village of Ameenabâd."

"How, father, what is your meaning? for Allah's sake explain."

"I mean, my son, that since you left that home, which, as you say, was rendered desolate and dreary enough to break the heart of its few remaining children, a powerful agency has been at work to re-assemble its scattered flock, and restore them to their own abodes; and so successful have these efforts been, that saving those who are numbered with the dead, few of their places are now empty. By the blessing of Allah, you will find the village nearly restored to its former state, and many a friend to greet you there."

"And to what blessed agency are these benefits due?" asked Hoossein. "But need I inquire?" continued he, clasping his hands with emotion, "does not my heart tell me that all is from him, who has so often saved

my life itself. Oh, may God restore him to us !”

“ You have said well, your friend has been indeed, the first and principal mover in all that has been done to remedy the evil committed by that wicked and miserable wretch, who has been taken in his own snare. Early aware of what had happened at Ameenabâd, and aware too of all your interests there, Allee had set his own agents in motion long before you found him at Hamadân. To his efforts, and influence with others, was it owing that the plundering Buchtiaree was baffled in his attempts to dispose of his captives at Kerman-shah; at which place you also experienced something of their power. And had your impatience been restrained, had you but waited the ripeness of events, it is probable that you would have avoided great dangers and subsequent misfortunes. Notwithstanding your imprudence, however, the spoilers found it more for their interest to accept a small ransom, and so get rid of their captives, than run the risk of loosing all, and incurring heavy chastisement to boot. Thus, all captives within reach have been liberated and sent back to their home. He knew the object of the inroad on the village, and to the recovery of your mistress he zealously and indefatigably addressed himself. He discovered that she had

neither reached Hamadân nor Kermanshah ; and his unceasing inquiries, at length, succeeded in discovering both the fact of her still remaining in the robbers' den, and also the reason of her detention. This once ascertained, the means, which had already effected so much, were used to accomplish her liberation also.

“ To explain these means is more than I can at present do. You can comprehend that they must have been powerful, and may imagine how widely spread must be that influence which can effect such objects with so much unerring certainty. It is, indeed, able to achieve far more than this ; more than you can fancy, or perhaps would believe. It is an engine, which, wielded with skill and knowledge, could now, as in times of yore, subvert thrones and kingdoms. But this is foreign to my purpose, which was to show you how much you truly owe to Allee, and what a mind is enshrined within the forbidding form of the Buchtiaree horse-dealer.”

“ Ay, father, what a mind, indeed ! May the Giver of all things look on us in mercy, and heal and spare him to us. Alas ! alas ! can it be, that the hand of such a wretch has been permitted to effect so great a calamity ? I cannot believe it ! I cannot endure the thought. And oh ! how much more bitter to think that he was smitten in protecting a worthless life like mine !”

“Forbear, my son, it is not thus the lesson should be received, nor the trial endured. Is it for worms like us to question the decrees of the Most High? If it were written that such was to be Allee’s fate, could it have been in thy power to save him from the stroke of destiny? Reflect! be wise, and let us, in all humility, submit to the Almighty will, awaiting the event with patient resignation.”

During all that long and anxious night, did Hoossein hover over the couch of his friend, whose sleep, at first profound and tranquil, after a time became troubled and uneasy; and his heart failed him as he observed the visible increase of every adverse symptom, the dry hot skin, the parched mouth, and heavy labouring breath. Yet still with the fond blindness of one, who will hope almost against conviction, did he watch with longing spirit for the coming morning, in the fond belief that its freshness would revive the sick, and give new life to the disordered frame. Vain hope! Morning indeed, came, and the feverish restlessness, which had agitated the sufferer, appeared to have gone with the shades of night; but the beams of the rising sun cast their light upon a countenance so sunken and pallid, that even Hoossein’s sanguine spirit could read nothing there but fast approaching death.

Dreadfully shocked and terrified, he rose

and would have called the Meerza, but the sick man beckoned him to come near, and besought him to sit beside the couch.

“ We have not, my dear Hoossein, much time to spend together ; let us not shorten it by useless attempts to relieve me. The Meerza can do nothing : no earthly power can now prolong my life, nor, but for thee, should I desire it to be lengthened. Can the knowledge of that secret I have sought so earnestly to learn ; the union I have panted for so long, be attained too early ? Could I but have seen thee happy, peacefully settled in thy native home, no wish would have remained ungratified. But such was not the will of the Most High, and the span of my life has been cut short by a murderer. Yet why blame the hand that looses the bonds of the captive, that frees the imprisoned soul, and sends it to the home it longs for ? God has said the word, and the spark flies upward to rejoin the parent fire ! Thy time, too, will come, my beloved. Thou hast yet a weary journey to perform, but thy spirit is not less an emanation from the Divine essence ; like mine it will seek for reunion, as the arrow flies to the mark, and once joined in bliss, we separate no more.”

Thus did Allee continue to speak, his mind occasionally wandering into the regions of mysticism, and at other times lighting up with a flash

of its pristine animation and firmness, till the Meerza entered. A single glance disclosed to him the truth, and he cast a significant look at Hoossein. It caught the eye of Allee, who replied to it with a ghastly smile, "Ay, friend, you are right, the scene is closing here; the great secret will soon be none to me, in another hour the subtle essence will have escaped, the worthless casket will alone remain!"

Calm and self-collected as the Meerza from long habit had become, he could not contemplate unmoved the last moments of this remarkable and interesting being. His agitation was not unobserved. "Thou art thinking, my brother, on the days we have passed, when life was young and hope more bright; when we strove together in the arduous paths of knowledge, and sought unwearied for the glorious consummation; many and chequered have they been, but dear to the hearts of both! Like life itself, they are gone and return not again. By the memory of those days, by the pure and holy love we have borne each other, I conjure thee to extend to this youth my second self, the guidance and protection which thou canst so well bestow, and he may much require."

"By the pure spirit of truth, which we have sought together, and the all-pervading essence of that divine love, I swear to observe thy behest," replied the Meerza solemnly.

“It is sufficient,” replied Allee, “I am satisfied. Bury me, my friend, in the spot which thou knowest; well dost thou remember the cause of this desire, and I know thou wilt perform for me this last office, as I should have done to thee, had the duty fallen to my lot. Hoossein, dear friend, forget not him who loved thee; and, when in future and happier days thou shalt look back to the scenes and dangers of thy youth, think of him who mingled in them, and only sought to save thee from evil.”

Hoossein could not speak: with difficulty he restrained his emotion, as he threw himself beside his dying friend, and clasped his hand now damp with the chill of death, and wiped the clammy dew from his brow. Allee acknowledged his sense of the service by a slight pressure of his hand: it was his last effort; for as Hoossein gazed, the once piercing eye became dim and fixed, the sound of death was heard in his throat, and a lifeless mass of clay was all that remained of the energetic and warm-hearted Allee Neemroo.

In a remote valley of the Buchtiaree mountains, and in a sheltered nook, may still be seen the ruins of a small mausoleum, surrounded by the remains of a garden, where some fruit trees yet struggle with the thorns and the ranker growth of the soil. Beside its run a clear brook which derives its

stream from a fountain in the hollow behind and which once rendered the garden a delicious spot. A little lower in the plain stand the roofless walls of a village now utterly deserted; the inhabitants have long since gone to occupy their narrow dwelling beneath the stones which mark an ancient burying ground. That village was once a great resort of pilgrims to the tomb in the garden, which was held in high repute as possessing many virtues. Even yet, though the mausoleum is in ruins, and the village has almost disappeared, the spot is regarded with a mysterious reverence, and many a wandering Eelaut and rude mountaineer, from Kerman-shah to Shuster, will halt in his journey, or turn from his path, to say a prayer at the tomb of the Horse-dealer of Louristân.

THE END.

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